

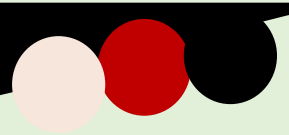
# *CALLING OUT INJUSTICE*

## *The Karrayyu Massacre and Beyond*



*Report of the Siingee Institute  
February 2022*





## ***Calling Out Injustice: The Karrayyu Massacre and Beyond***

We at the *Siinqee* Institute are heartbroken by the December 1, 2021, massacre of Indigenous Karrayyu Oromo *gadaa* leaders in Ethiopia. We raise our *siinqee* to symbolize our collective action in the pursuit of justice and [call out](#) this despicable inhuman cruelty. We also call in to facilitate healing from the deep wounds of this broken humanity.

The *Siinqee* institute is a non-profit organization registered in Canada. We are a network of community-engaged international and intergenerational scholars and professionals. We work with Indigenous, transnational grassroots, and women's groups. We are held together by our commitment to the *siinqee* [core principles](#) of *relationality*, *solidarity*, and *justice* adopted from the worldviews of various Indigenous peoples around the world.

In *relationality*, we embrace the fundamental truth that all beings in the universe, living and nonliving, are inseparably entangled and woven together by the checks and balances of [egalitarian](#) relationships. We embrace the [primacy of relationships](#) in which all beings, identities, communities, and nations are deeply rooted. We appreciate the fundamental reality of a world where diverse worldviews co-exist in harmonious egalitarian plurality.

In *solidarity*, we acknowledge that such harmonious egalitarian coexistence of all beings is constantly unsettled by relations of domination. We highlight the [need for solidarity](#) in the struggle to restore the checks and balances of the fundamental truth. We embrace the Indigenous values of [mutual empathy](#), mutual care, and respectful relations with humans and the natural environment, particularly with Mother Earth and her resources.

In *justice*, we embrace our moral and ethical responsibility for the pursuit of justice, highlighting Indigenous notions of [justice as healing](#) and restorative. Beyond retribution, we seek justice that heals by mending, repairing, and restoring disrupted relationships and cosmic fabrics. We call out injustice as much as we [call in](#) to soothe the wounds of injustice in all its plurality. We seek to restore the checks and balances of the fundamental truth in the respectful relations and egalitarian coexistence of all creation.

It is in this sense of deep relationality and mutual empathy that we feel devastated by the massacre of Indigenous Karrayyu Oromo *gadaa* leaders (see Annex). It is in this kinship that we seek justice to restore the ripped cosmic fabric and heal the broken humanity.

Turning to the specific context of the Oromo Indigenous tradition, the [siinqee institution](#) of Oromo women is a central institution of the [gadaa system](#). The two are inseparable parts of a wholistic system fused together by mutual empathy and egalitarian functional interdependence. *Siinqee* is woven into *gadaa* as a living dynamic mechanism of maintaining the checks and balances of gender-based power relations. As respected mediators and peacemakers, women often use ritual [songs as their practice of justice](#).

Curbing gender-based domination by *siinqee* is just one of the many checks and balances in the plurality of *gadaa* power relations. Masculine dominance is inseparably twined with other forms of domination, including dominance over the natural environment. The *gadaa* system maintains myriad checks and balances to curb each relation of domination. It holds a wealth of Indigenous knowledge vital for conflict prevention and conflict resolution as well as the protection of human rights, the natural environment, and sustainable peace.

Indeed, [UNESCO](#) states that it has registered the Indigenous democratic socio-political system of the Oromo *gadaa* as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Ironically, however, UNESCO does not have a mandate to investigate the heinous crime committed against the Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders and bearers of this priceless heritage of humanity.

As the sources and custodians of the *gadaa* knowledge system, Karrayyu leaders embody the core principles we uphold at the *Siinqee* Institute. The massacre of these leaders is an assault on this sublime heritage of humanity. We are appalled by this brutal assault on the Indigenous knowledge systems that sustain us locally, transnationally, and internationally. We raise our symbolic *siinqee* in collective action to call out the injustice.

Seeking the minimal justice allowed within the legal systems of governments and international instruments, we have called upon the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission for an independent investigation. We have provided key evidence with the hope of facilitating truth seeking and bringing perpetrators to justice.

However, seeking truth in the wholistic sense of Indigenous justice demands of us to go far beyond the legal systems of governments and international instruments. In a world where truth is the first casualty distorted by intense disinformation, we also need to seek the truth within our own systems of Indigenous knowledge base.

In Indigenous justice, healing the grief-stricken families and communities of victims and restoring the broken humanity can only begin when [the truth](#) of the crime is wholistically told as raw as it is and when we all have the courage to listen to it in all its ugliness.

It is within these meanings of Indigenous justice that we, at the *Siinqee* Institute, present the truth we learned in our own truth seeking. We have gleaned multiple sources of information and eyewitness accounts and spoken with truth tellers of the Karrayyu community. In the following few pages, we tell the truth as wholistically as we learned it.

To start the collective process of [justice as healing](#), we appeal to all truth-seeking individuals, groups and organizations, to please bring your own truths with open hearts and minds. If the fundamental truth is not restored and the open wounds are not healed, it will be hard to find sustainable peace in any corner of the world. Together, let us restore the ripped cosmic fabric and heal our broken humanity.

The *Siinqee* Institute  
February 2022

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## ***The Massacre: Moment of Truth***



*A traumatized Karrayyu community burying its slaughtered leaders in mass graves*

Karrayyu leaders were preparing for festive Indigenous gadaa ceremonies when they unexpectedly faced their final moments on earth. A moment of truth in the most desolate of places. The shockwaves continue to reverberate throughout the world. And our hearts continue to tremble with the traumatized Karrayyu community.

On December 1, 2021, the Karrayyu community was gathered on the Karrayyu sacred ground for their Indigenous *gadaa* [prayer ceremony](#) in the Fantalle district of East Shewa Zone, Oromia, Ethiopia. Suddenly, government forces clad in police uniforms descended on them in several patrol cars and wreaked havoc. They rounded up thirty-nine *gadaa* leaders in broad daylight in front of their families and drove them away in an Isuzu truck.

The Karrayyu are renowned for defending their community, but the unsuspecting victims were caught in the vulnerable moment of preparing for prayer. They were also deceived when the security forces told them that the government wanted them for consultation. The leaders were tricked into going with the security forces without question or resistance.

Once the leaders were secured on the back of the truck, the police tone changed, and they started threatening the Karrayyu leaders and telling them that they would be killed. The day before, on November 30, eleven police officers had been killed by unidentified armed group in another district. The leaders were asked if they knew who killed them. The leaders did not. They did not even know about the incident.

Government forces drove the leaders to the district of Boset, singled out and summarily executed fourteen leaders of the [Michillee gadaa](#), including Kadiroo Hawaas Boru, the young *Abbaa Bokkuu* [Holder of the Scepter]. May they all rest in peace.



This is Kadiroo Hawaas Boru, the young *Abbaa Bokkuu of the Michillee gadaa* who was murdered on December 1, 2021. May he rest in peace.

*Abbaa Bokkuu* means Holder of the Sceptre. *Abbaa Bokkuu* represents the highest administrative office of *gadaa*. It means that Kadiroo was the overall leader of the *Michillee gadaa*.

As the leader of leaders, Kadiroo tried to mediate on behalf of those rounded up. He showed the police his ID and asked why they round up lawful citizens. The police retorted, telling him that he would be killed with his ID card.

Two leaders escaped from the carnage and returned to their community. Government forces drove away the remaining twenty-five leaders who disappeared. No one knew where they were taken. The community feared they were executed in a different location.

The cruelest human tragedy yet, is that the bodies of these leaders were denied human dignity even after their brutal murder. The traumatized Karrayyu community buried its murdered leaders only after vultures gouged out their eyes and hyenas devoured parts of their bodies. This inhuman cruelty further traumatized the community who were prevented from burying their leaders in dignity before [the sacrilege](#).

Chilling images of the leaders' desecrated bodies were splashed on social media in graphic details, even though the government had imposed media blackout as part of the national State of Emergency. Other media coverage was very minimal for the sheer scale of this tragedy, especially as *gadaa* is a UNESCO Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

As if the desecration of sacred bodies and sacred grounds was not enough, the government added insult to injury by spreading disinformation. [Conflicting narratives](#) emerged absolving the government and blaming the atrocities on Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), a group officials name as Shanee and designate as terrorist. The OLA issued statement denying the allegations. The Karrayyu truth is caught in a crossfire.

Along with the eyewitness accounts of Karrayyu families and truth-tellers, various media outlets continued to spread the disinformation in local languages. The sheer force of the confusing narratives and unbridled disinformation overwhelmed people and ended up effectively silencing the truth of Karrayyu communities.

Karrayyu communities were consistent in their truth that the government security forces were the culprits and that they have [no knowledge](#) of the group the government calls *Shanee*. Survivors of the pogrom [attest](#) to this truth.

They say they were targeted for honoring their *gadaa* tradition and choosing to reconcile the warring parties instead of picking sides and joining the civil war. That was considered contrary to the government's call on all citizens to join the raging all-out civil war. A mother said that the police told them that they will [burn them down](#) along with their *gadaa* system.

Elders of the traumatized Karrayyu families and communities continued to search for their missing *gadaa* leaders. They scoured hidden areas with the hope of finding their bodies and they searched regular and makeshift prisons with the hope of finding them alive.

After initially refusing to comment on the massacre of the Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders, the larger union of *gadaa* leaders of Oromia [broke its silence](#). It informed the elders of the searching community that the missing Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders were in a detention center in Mojo. Rejecting the denial of responsibility by government officials, the union condemned the brutal killing of the *gadaa* leaders and demanded an investigation.

On December 12, 2021, eleven days after the massacre, the searching Karrayyu elders received the severely beaten and disfigured body of Jiloo Boorayyu Hawaas, one of the missing older Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders. He was murdered by torture and starvation in police custody at the Mojo prison. This further ascertained that government forces were responsible for these atrocities.

An [eyewitness](#) who survived both the carnage of the killing field and the torture of the prison said that the older *gadaa* leader succumbed to the constant torture and starvation. He said the leader died on December 8, 2021, but the authorities kept his body in their overcrowded cell for four days, despite the prisoners' repeated appeal to release his body.

Adding insult to injury, government forces continued to harass, beat, and torture ordinary Karrayyu individuals in the community. While all these point to government forces as the perpetrators of the atrocities, government officials themselves continued to [deny the truth](#) that the Karrayyu families and elders knew all along. However, there came a major turning point where the truth could no more be denied or contained even by the might of the gun.



At the end of December, almost a month after the massacre, a federal [State Minister](#) of Peace and a federal [Member of Parliament](#) took to social media, boldly accusing Oromia regional forces of the massacre. As if by magic, six of the disappeared leaders were released on December 30.

The Oromia government that was denying responsibility and blaming its own atrocities on OLA only a few weeks ago, now stood accused of the mass murder of the Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders. Moment of reckoning for the Oromia government. However, victims reported that officials continued to clampdown on ordinary Karrayyu community members, harassing, beating, and imprisoning them.

However, the accusation between the federal and regional governments is a far cry from the pursuit of justice and seeking the hidden truth of the suffering Karrayyu community. The level of disinformation and the ensuing confusion that the government spread to absolve itself and blame the appalling atrocities on those it seeks to destroy was unprecedented. It is obvious that Karrayyu families will find [no justice or solace](#) in such a system bloodied by atrocities and muddied by blatant deception and corruption of truth.

The raw facts remain. Of the thirty-nine *gadaa* leaders driven away on December 1<sup>st</sup> as Karrayyu community members witnessed, fourteen were executed the same day. Two escaped and returned home. One was tortured to death in custody on December 8. Six were released on December 30 and the remaining sixteen were released on January 22 after being denied family visit. (See Annex 1 for all their names and titles of *gadaa* office).

In the aftermath of the massacre, the six released Karrayyu leaders came out of prison to two shocking new realities. First, their Karrayyu communities were dispossessed and displaced as their land was taken over by new settlers who had previously crossed into Oromia from the Amhara Region. Under the protection of federal and regional forces, the new settlers were already producing charcoal by cutting down precious trees that the Karrayyu had protected for generations. Drastic changes within a month of the massacre!

The second shock was the attempt to coopt leaders into [burying their own truth](#). To stop the harassment and killing, the leaders were asked to spread disinformation and call on their Shanee (OLA) children to lay down their arms and come home.

The Karrayyu community knew the truth that their leaders were massacred and tortured by government forces. However, these leaders found that they were being asked to bury their truth and incriminate themselves to absolve the officials. They were asked to tell everyone that their leaders were killed by their own Shanee (OLA) children. Regional officials were demanding this even after federal officials exposed the truth.

Finally, the truth the Karrayyu leaders and community have always known officially came out on February 2, 2022, when the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission [reported](#) the results of its investigation. The report stated that the murder of the fourteen Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders constituted extrajudicial killing by security forces. And it called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice and the victims' families compensated.

## ***Before the Massacre: Karrayyu Gadaa Life***



*Karrayyu gadaa village, peacefully and harmoniously integrated into the natural environment*

The Karrayyu are one of the few surviving pastoralist communities in East Africa who live in [harmony](#) with the natural environment. Their rhythms of life are tuned into the fundamental truth that all living and nonliving beings in the universe are inseparably woven together by the checks and balances of respectful [egalitarian](#) relationships.

This fundamental truth guides the Karrayyu concept of [harmonious relationships](#) between *Uumaa* [Creator] and *Uumama* [Creation] and among all forms of *Uumama* [Creation], human and nonhuman, living and nonliving. It shapes the respectful egalitarian relations between the Karrayyu and the multiplicity of these diverse beings with whom they coexist. Indeed, the Karrayyu [relationship with the land](#) and the natural environment is that of mutual care, mutual empathy, and stewardship.

These universal checks and balances of respectful egalitarian relationships are reflected in the [Karrayyu gadaa](#) socio-political system. It is part of the larger Oromo *gadaa* system, an Indigenous egalitarian socio-political system of the Oromo people who constitute 40% of Ethiopia's 110 million people.

The *gadaa* system waned in large parts of the Oromo society, largely due to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century bloody conquest and incorporation into Imperial Ethiopia. However, through many decades of the Oromo people's struggle for justice and liberation, Oromos are now revaluing and reclaiming their Indigenous *gadaa* system. This struggle shaped the registering of *gadaa* as a [UNESCO](#) Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Karrayyu are one of the few Oromo clans who, against all odds of extinction, continue to practice *gadaa* system to this day. Among Karrayyu Oromos, *gadaa* is organized into five age-grade *gadaa* parties called [tuuta](#). Every person is born into and belongs for life to one of the five *tuuta gadaa*: Dirmajii, Michillee, Duuloo, Robalee, and Melbaa. While the naming and sequencing of these parties may differ, the basic egalitarian principles holding them together are the same across Oromia where *gadaa* is practiced.

Each *gadaa* party rules for 8 years after which power is ceremonially transferred from one party to the next every 8 years. The cycle starts again after 40 years and after each of the five parties had ruled for 8 years. Within each of the [tuuta gadaa](#) leaders, there is the *Dullacha* (Elder) and the *Baasoo* (Younger) groups. This is an intergenerational system where the Elders pass on the age-old knowledge and ancestral teachings to the younger generation of leaders within the context of leading together.

Each ruling [tuuta gadaa](#) holds various seasonal ceremonies of *jila gadaa* during its tenure of power. These ceremonies and rituals are integrative practices where all Karrayyu *gadaa* parties and their respective communities gather on their sacred grounds. They gather for prayers, ceremonies, celebrations, rites of passage rituals, seasonal transition rituals, consultation on legislation, and other social and collective actions. The ruling party facilitates and presides over these ceremonies.

The Karrayyu communities on *jila gadaa* trek to the sacred grounds of the *gadaa* village in celebratory and prayerful ceremonial processions. This [trailer](#) from a 2015 Karrayyu *Mijuu Gadaa* documentary gives a glimpse of the beautiful rhythmic trekking procession and some of the ceremonies.

The trekking community sings itself to the sacred ground of the *jila gadaa*. Among the songs is *tarree tarree*, which means taking turns, reflecting the harmonious ceremony of power transfer. A leader explains that *gadaa* leaders don't grab power by force or by gift of inheritance. They must patiently wait for their turn and take power respectfully and ceremonially. They rule for 8 years and transfer power to the next *gadaa* party as ceremonially and respectfully as they received it.

Karrayyu ceremonies and celebrations are prayerful and thankful, reflecting the fundamental truth in their harmonious relationship with *Uumaa* (Creator) and all *Uumama* (Creation). The Karrayyu live their deepest philosophy of respectful relationship and environmental stewardship in their everyday lives and ritual practices. They wear it in the marks on their bodies and with the garments and ornaments with which they adorn themselves. They weave it into their hairstyles. They carry it on their livestock and take it with them wherever they go.

In every ritual, [women's siingee](#) is harmoniously keyed into *gadaa* to uphold the checks and balances of the fundamental truth. The pictures below show Karrayyu women performing their thanksgiving rituals of *Irreessa* (aka *Irreecha*) at the *gadaa* village.



*At the gadaa village, Karrayyu women hold their siingees and perform thanksgiving (photo: Social Media).*



*Karrayyu women lay down their siingee before them and sing Umayyoo (photo: Social Media).*

In this [short video](#), Karrayyu women offer a prayerful song to their *Uumaa* (Creator) at a 2015 Irreessa ceremony in Fantalle. “*Uumayyoo, Uumayyoo, uumaatee ta ganamaa ya Waaqayyoo,*” they sing, endearing *Waaqayyoo*, God their Creator. They offer thanks for the fundamental truth of their harmonious coexistence and respectful relationships. They pray for the continuity of their communities and the preservation of the land and nature.

Prayers and offerings notwithstanding, they continue to be pushed into the [margins](#). Their continued existence is in peril, much like other [Indigenous peoples](#) of the world. The picture below shows Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders in a moment of vulnerability.



Some Elders of the Michillee *gadaa* massacred on December 1, 2021 (photo: Social Media)

These are some of the intergenerational Karrayyu leaders of the *Michillee gadaa* who were massacred on December 1, 2021. The unsuspecting victims were caught in their most vulnerable moment of preparing for their Indigenous *gadaa* prayer ceremony.

They were gathered on their sacred ground of the *gadaa* village. Generations after generations of Karrayyu gathered on this sacred ground for many centuries. They gathered here on December 1<sup>st</sup> for the rituals and festive ceremonies of seasonal transition. It was the end of *birraa* [spring] and the beginning of *bona* [the dry season]. It is a time to temporarily move the cattle to greener pastures in distant grazing lands, a time for prayers for direction, safety, and protection.

No guns, spears, swords, or even sticks with metals are taken into their prayer ceremony. Instead, we see them holding these long slender flexible branches of *harooressa* tree. The thinness and flexibility of these rods symbolize the intertwined fragility and strength in the power of their prayer ceremony. *Harooressa* was their only armament. This was how they were caught off guard and massacred - unsuspecting, vulnerable, deceived by their own government, and betrayed by all who had the responsibility to protect them.



*Young Karrayyu men holding harooressa in other festivities and good times (photo: Paola Viesi)*

*Harooressa* is a sacred object normally taken to rituals and ceremonies. These young Karrayyu men from a different ceremony are holding it for festivities and good times. Their *harooressa* supplication produced joyous celebrations.

The massacred leaders were not as lucky. They were in their moment of *harooressa* supplication and vulnerability when government security forces came out of nowhere, when they surrounded them and wreaked havoc. Plucked out of the harmonious natural environment of their sacred ground, fourteen older and younger leaders of the *Michillee gadaa* were massacred in an unprecedented cruelty.

The union of Gadaa leaders of Oromia states that the brutality with which the *Michillee gadaa* leaders are massacred is unprecedented. Imagine a government and all its cabinet ministers being wiped out in just one strike. Such cruelty against an entire gadaa leadership did not happen even during the bloody conquest of Oromos in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. And it never happened since – not during the imperial rule, the military rule, or the EPRDF rule. This signals a new era of brutal repression against Oromos.

The *Michillee gadaa* took power in 2018 from the previous *Dirmajii gadaa* that ruled for the 8 years prior to 2018. The *Michillee gadaa* was supposed to rule for 8 years and transfer power to the next party of *Duuloo gadaa* at the end of 2025. Although the other four *gadaa* parties are intact, the massacre of the *Michillee gadaa* leadership has tragic ramifications.

The brutal interruption of the *gadaa* cycle spells a major crisis primarily because the rank and file of the entire *Michillee gadaa* is left leaderless and traumatized. More fundamentally, however, the interruption disrupts the very foundation of the cyclical and rhythmic succession of *gadaa* that is deeply tuned into the broader rhythms of natural and cosmic cycles.

Indeed, this is a major crisis not only for the marginalized Karrayyu pastoralist community that is taking the brunt, no doubt, but also for the larger Oromo society of which the Karrayyu are a part. The Karrayyu predicament fits into the broader patterns of targeted leadership cleansing and disenfranchisement of Oromos by Ethiopian governments.

It also fits into even broader historical patterns of [victimization and dispossession](#) by which most Indigenous nations and peoples of Ethiopia lost their traditional Indigenous self-governance systems. It fits into the pattern of how many Indigenous peoples were robbed off their traditional lands and ceremonies and were integrated into imperial Ethiopia through the bloody conquest of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### ***The Broader Context***

Traditionally, Karrayyu pastoralists inhabited large parts of the lush green lands of the Awash River Valley. Since the 1960s, however, they have been dispossessed of vast areas of their traditional grazing lands and water sources and gradually pushed into smaller and smaller tracts of arid land.

Central development schemes of various Ethiopian governments grabbed their grazing land for development, [disenfranchising](#) the Karrayyu without making them beneficiaries of the fruits of development. The modern land grabbing scheme that Emperor Haile Selassie started, escalated during both the Derg military government that took over from the Emperor and during the EPRDF government that succeeded the Derg.

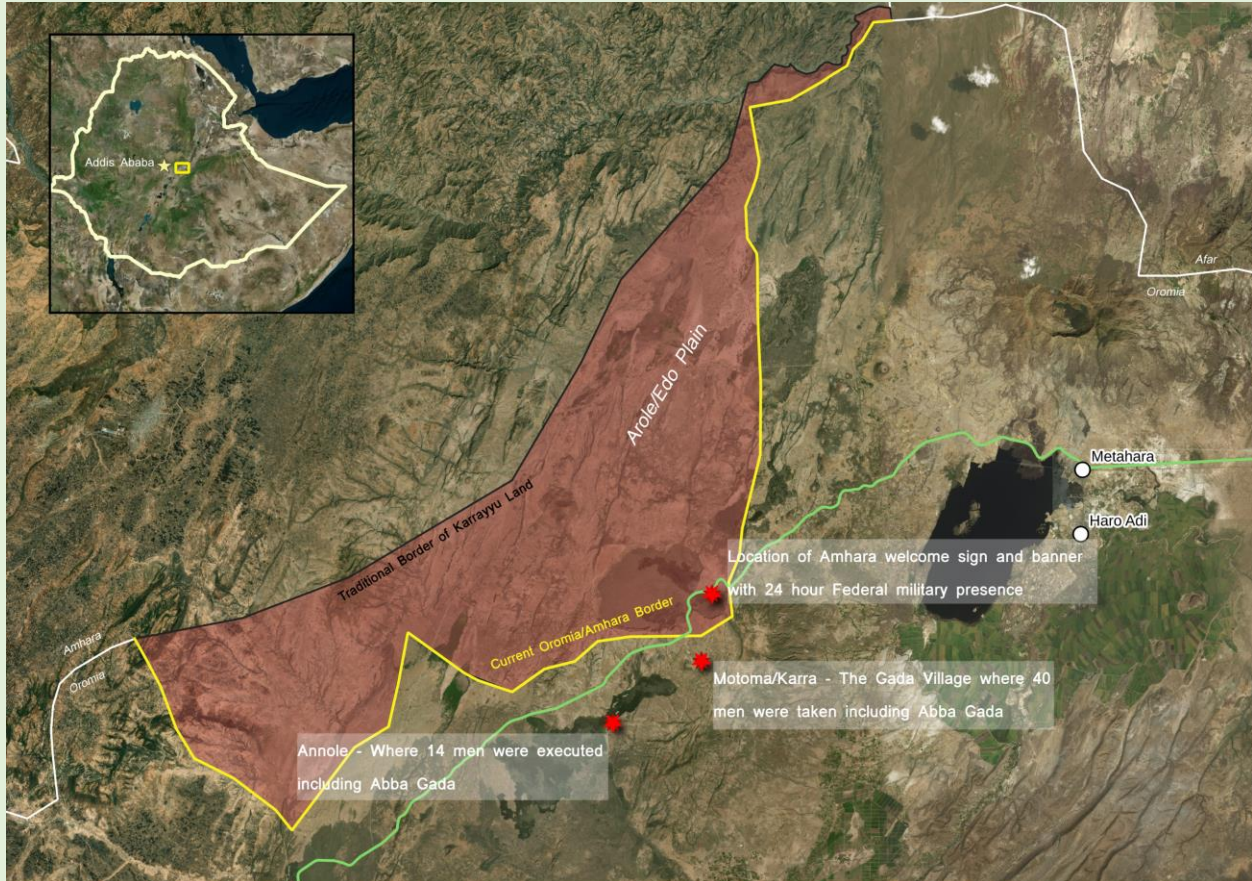
Like other Indigenous peoples of Ethiopia who were [tricked and dispossessed](#), The Karrayyu suffered through a series of [development projects](#) that left them marginalized. Large-scale state and commercial farming, irrigation projects on the Awash River Valley, the Koka dam project, Matahara sugar plantation and sugar mills, the Awash National Park, and more recently the Nura Era fruit plantation, all gobbled up the traditional grazing land and water sources of Karrayyu pastoralists.

Moreover, these projects spat out chemical waste products and water pollutants imperiling the water resources of Karrayyu communities. While water is treated for use on the plantations, Karrayyu communities and their livestock suffer from the poisoning of their drinking water because they cannot access such water treatment.

Karrayyu pastoralists have also been challenged by aggressive conflicts with other neighboring ethnic groups like the Afar and Amhara. These groups regularly engage in cross-border raids into Karrayyu territories, fighting, killing, taking livestock, burning houses, and displacing Karrayyu communities.

As a former government official recently [revealed](#), the Karrayyu community is particularly targeted and victimized by armed expansionist Amhara groups. These groups have crossed the border from the Amhara Region and settled in the heart of the Karrayyu grazing land, further pushing them out into near extinction.

According to this former official, the Oromia Region is muddled by corruption, and it is not willing to protect Karrayyu communities against the current blatant land robbing and displacement. Indeed, government officials turn a blind eye and allow the atrocities against Karrayyu communities to happen. Below, a recent geolocated map vividly shows the dispossession of Karrayyu land and sites of the current atrocities.



*The dispossession of Karrayyu land and sites of atrocities (Map: Aaron Eubank/Roba J)*

The brown area shows the heart of Karrayyu grazing land invaded and settled by expansionist groups from the Amhara region just in the last three years. With the Amhara region pushing deep into Oromia, the yellow line is now the new border between the two.

The red stars on the Karrayyu side of the new border show the sites of the December 1<sup>st</sup> atrocities. One is the sacred ground of the *Gadaa* Village where the Karrayyu community gathered for prayer ceremonies and seasonal celebrations. This is where the government forces suddenly raided and rounded up the *Michillee gadaa* leaders. The second star shows the site where the 14 leaders were summarily executed.

The star on the Amhara side of the new border shows the new site of Amhara settlement and the specific location of a welcome sign into the Amhara Region. The image below shows the welcome sign and the message inscribed on it.





*Welcome to Amhara Region, North Shewa Zone, M/Shenkora District (photo: Roba J)*

Located on the Addis Ababa to Djibouti road, this welcome sign heralds the new town of Amhara settlement in Oromia. A Karrayyu eyewitness says that the Karrayyu community took down this sign several times disputing the illegal settlement. However, the settlers kept putting it up again. Unfortunately for the Karrayyu, the new settlement is protected by the federal military and regional forces of Oromia.

According to the former government official who [exposed](#) the land invasion schemes, the new settlers were initially protected by special forces of the Amhara Region. At the start of the land invasion three years ago, over 270 hectares of Karrayyu land was taken away. Infrastructures like electricity, running water, roads, hospitals, and schools were built for the new settlement. He notes that this is just one example in the larger project of dismantling the Oromia Region, economically, politically, socially, and territorially.

Just on the other side of the new boarder, Karrayyu communities struggle for their lives and livelihoods, deeply impacted by the loss of their grazing land and the severe lack of infrastructure. With these twisted development schemes, the Karrayyu are reduced to a survival struggle to protect and preserve their way of life.

They are marginalized and victimized by a complexity of economic, political, and social factors in this era of heightened [global land rush](#). Even within their limited resources and restrictive arid area, however, their [gadaa ceremonies](#) are spiritually and culturally rich. Their indigenous *gadaa* is praised for its egalitarian relations, conflict prevention and resolution, sustainable peace, and harmonious relationship with the natural environment.

The current entrenching authoritarianism is [driving dispossession](#) and blatant robbery of Indigenous land in Ethiopia and around the world. Land grabbing is meant for extraction and investment development, not for the development of people or the wellbeing of communities. Indigenous [pastoralist communities](#) like Karrayyu are especially targeted and their egalitarian environmentally protective worldviews are aggressively attacked.

## Broader Attacks on Gadaa

The current massacre is by far the [most brutal](#) of over a century of Karrayyu victimization. The Karrayyu massacre is experienced across Oromo groups as a scheme aimed at breaking the spirit of Oromos in general. It is felt as a broader leadership cleansing that strikes at the heart of the larger Oromo identity and terrorizes any gesture of claiming *gadaa* as a symbol of collective identity.

Different Oromos reclaim *gadaa* for different reasons. Those who claim the spiritual aspects of *gadaa* seek harmonious relationship between humans and all living and nonliving beings of the universe. Those who claim it for cultural needs indulge in cultural festivities like the *Irreecha* thanksgiving. Others reclaim *gadaa* for socio-political reasons.

In the socio-political sense, *gadaa* is reclaimed by freedom-loving and justice-seeking Oromos who aspire for egalitarian relationships and democracy. They see it as the Oromo Indigenous democracy with a wealth of Indigenous knowledge relevant for sustainable peace and for protecting human rights and the natural environment. [UNESCO](#) registering it as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, makes them reclaim *gadaa* more proudly.

The Oromo struggle for democracy reclaims *gadaa* as a model for democratizing Oromia with the hope that democratizing Oromia will contribute its share to democratizing Ethiopia. Very sadly, however, as evidenced in the current Karrayyu massacre of *gadaa* leaders, the authoritarian ambition currently dominating Ethiopian politics cannot tolerate the practice of *gadaa* even among these most marginalized Karrayyu pastoralists. The egalitarian culture of Indigenous democracy is a threat to their authoritarian aspirations.

On October 2, 2016, another brutal massacre was visited on Oromos as they gathered on the sacred ground of Hora Harsadii for *gadaa* festivities – the *Irreecha* ceremony of Oromo thanksgiving. That day, [about seven hundred](#) unsuspecting celebrants lost their lives by live bullets of soldiers and by stampede. Government forces are responsible both for the 2016 massacre of *gadaa* celebrants and the current 2021 massacre of Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders, but their response is denial, externalization, and further disinformation.

While *gadaa* has several central institutions of checks and balances which are equally attacked, for our current purpose, we focus on the *siinqee* institution. *Siinqee* is attacked because it is one of the central pillars of safeguarding the wholistic egalitarian checks and balances of gender-based power relations in *gadaa*. As they are inseparably twined, when *gadaa* is attacked *siinqee* is not spared. Women's *siinqee* initiatives of making peace and demanding justice were attacked many times just in the last three years.

In November 2018, for example, *siinqee* women from Naqamtee, western Oromia, raised their *siinqee* collectively and trekked to Addis Ababa. Reclaiming Oromo women's *siinqee* tradition of calling out injustice and making peace, the women demanded that the government lift the military [command post](#) that was wreaking havoc in their communities since October 2018. It is *siinqee* women's sacred duty to initiate [dispute resolution](#).

The *siinqee* women hoped that the government would at least respectfully listen to their demands of justice because these officials claim to honor *gadaa*. Instead, they ridiculed, shamed, and sent the *siinqee* women back to worsening conflict and escalating military atrocities on vulnerable innocent civilians. Instead of dispute resolution as the *siinqee* women initiated, [unparalleled deception](#), beating, imprisoning, and killing youth continued. Soldiers continued to harass, beat, burn homes and crops, and displace innocent people.

In another incident on August 30, 2020, *siinqee* women in Awaday, eastern Oromia, mobilized a [women-only](#) peaceful rally to protest the rampant killing, beating, raping, and mass arrest of Oromos by security forces and Ethiopian military.

When *siinqee* women leave their homes and take to the streets, it signals that the red line has been crossed. The message is that home is not safe anymore, that the carnage has come into their homes, that the military is raping and murdering women in their own homes. Women leave home when they are tired of violent onslaughts on their personhood and the ensuing shame and humiliation. It is their sacred duty to protect their home.

When women leave their homes in protest, it means that they are raising their symbolic *siinqee* to stop the violence. It means that they are tired of crying secretly and burying their sons and husbands murdered by government security forces. It means that they are tired of perpetually caring for community members unlawfully injured and imprisoned. Taking to the streets was the *siinqee* women's collective cries of calling out injustice.

Alas! The military responded by beating, jailing, and firing live ammunition into the crowd of unarmed women and girls. Some women and girls were rounded up and taken to the military barracks for more rape and assault. With such violent responses to ordinary citizens' demands of justice, we can assume that the fundamental truth is violated beyond recognition, calls for solidarity have been stifled, and perpetual injustice has ruled the day.

### *Leadership Cleansing*

Happening on the heels of such attacks on *gadaa* and the escalating atrocities in general, we can contextualize the massacre of Karrayu *gada* leaders and normalize the abnormal. However, this massacre goes beyond the imaginable because these leaders were not out in protest, they were not demanding anything from anyone.

These leaders were simply living out their mundane lives in the best way Karrayus lived honoring their traditions for many generations. They were simply performing their leadership duties in preparing their community for a prayer ceremony. They were caught at their most vulnerable by those who must know their moment of defenselessness.

What is behind such cold blood massacre of Karrayu *gadaa* leaders? How can anyone explain this? Why are these leaders targeted? This inhuman cruelty and merciless killing can only be explained as the culmination of the ongoing leadership cleansing of Oromo organizations and institutions. It fits into the pattern of systematically eliminating leaders and leaving their flocks vulnerable, leaderless, defenseless, and disenfranchised.

But the Karrayyu gadaa leaders are no ordinary leaders; they are *gadaa* leaders and that has a particularly profound significance. Massacring the entire leadership of the *Michillee gadaa* impacts not only the Karrayyu community and the larger Oromo society, but also the diverse peoples of Ethiopia and the larger humanity. This is a loss to all humanity.

These leaders are custodians of invaluable *gadaa* knowledge. They are our libraries and encyclopedias of rare Indigenous knowledge system we cannot access from anyone else. They are the deep wells from which Oromos draw ancestral knowledge for their survival and continuity as a people. The elimination of Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders is experienced as a desire to eradicate Oromo claims of deep identity and eliminate them as a people.

While killing Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders hits Oromo aspirations and identity claims at its purest and most profound, the leadership cleansing carried out against Oromos is much more pervasive. Oromo leaders are viciously attacked whether they are spiritual, political, traditional, or youth leaders. Strategies of leadership cleansing include, killing, exiling, and imprisoning, or silencing by harassing, intimidating, coopting, or bribing.

Oromos reclaim their Indigenous *gadaa* system in their aspirations for democracy and justice. They have broad-based initiatives revaluing and reviving traditional institutions of *gadaa*, including *siinqee*. However, under the current repression of anything democratic, traditional leaders of *gadaa* and *siinqee* are coopted and silenced or made into speaking tools of the government. Or they are imprisoned or massacred like the Karrayyu leaders.

Oromo [political leaders](#) encountered similar leadership cleansing. Opposition political parties were openly harassed, intimidated, pitted against each other, bribed and coopted. Or they were rounded up and thrown in prison on trumped up charges. Added to their own internal weaknesses, such blatant and systematic attack left Oromo political parties weakened, leaderless and disenfranchised.

Young Oromo leaders who spearheaded the years of peaceful protests that brought the current government to power are particularly hunted down and [eliminated](#) because they were fearless seekers of democracy and justice. Artists who inspired the [young leaders](#) of grassroots movements for democracy were murdered, imprisoned, exiled, or coopted.

Assassinating Hachalu Hundessa who [sang for freedom](#) and inspired his generation of peaceful protestors, was only the most prominent of leadership cleansing in artists and musicians. Other youth who had any inkling of democratic aspirations were murdered, [publicly executed](#), jailed, or exiled. Many fled to the woods to join the [armed resistance](#) in the absence of space for peaceful resistance.

The above examples are parts of the ongoing Oromo leadership cleansing schemes of Ethiopian governments. The tragic Karrayyu massacre is leadership cleansing that left an entire rank and file of the *Michillee gadaa* leaderless. Youth movements, journalists, artists, political parties, the institutions of *gadaa* and *siinqee*, are left leaderless, weakened, and disenfranchised.

## *Rising Global Authoritarianism*

The Karrayyu crisis betrays systemic problems that are much broader than Ethiopia. In an intimately interconnected world, local tyranny is in mutually enabling relationships with rising tides of global authoritarianism. The tyranny entrenching in Ethiopia is nestled in and sustained by regional and global networks of authoritarian systems. We are told that [autocracies rise](#) globally wherever [democracies fail](#) to deliver their promises.

We see the current civil war raging in Ethiopia as being enabled by the global struggle between rising authoritarianism and receding democracy. It is a war of visions stifling democratic aspirations and entrenching autocracy. Ethiopia was the subject of over a dozen UN Security Council meetings in just a year. But the international community could not prevent the bloodshed because of the competing struggles within itself.

As a government of governments, the UN could enact its [Responsibility to Protect](#) vulnerable civilians when their own governments fail to protect them. Yet, its competing interests have left Ethiopia swimming in a bloodbath. It could not prevent atrocities when the Ethiopian government not only failed in its responsibility to protect but also turned against its own citizens. Regional bodies like the African Union and the European Union and other UN agencies are parts of the same global system of competing interests.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that it offers a [framework](#) for the survival, dignity, and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. But this is not accessible to the Indigenous peoples victimized by their own governments. Any concern or complaint of atrocities by governments must go back to those governments who abhor inviting [independent monitors](#). Victims of atrocities are caught in an impossible catch-22 situation.

The Karrayyu massacre is couched within this global system where the traumatized community desperately seeks but finds no semblance of truth or justice. Although [UNESCO](#) validates *gadaa* as its intangible heritage of humanity, it has no mechanism for protecting these custodians of *gadaa* from such wanton atrocities. Ironically, the primary responsibility to protect them remains with their own government that kills them.

In our increasingly polarized and militarized world, rising inequities and violent conflicts are driven by greed and the desire for domination, including the domination of nature. We are learning that no amount of militarization, no number of military victories, guns, arms, or technologies could make the world safer or the planet sustainable. No single ideology or religion or culture can address the systemic injustices of our world.

It's time for deep critical collective reflections and for world leaders to rethink their ways. It's time for freedom-loving, justice-seeking courageous people to come together from across all the divides of competing interests and ideologies, democracies and autocracies, and find some common grounds to address our shared global injustices.

In this collective journey, the Karrayyu crisis offers a textbook case of understanding the depths and complexities of what justice means within Indigenous knowledge systems.

## ***Calling in: Towards Justice as Healing***

In this last section of calling in, we outline the basic elements of justice as healing and conclude by calling upon all relevant authorities to come together from across differences and competing interests and enable a collective healing. The Karrayyu crisis shows how harming one is harming all, and how all must come together for the totality to heal.

We acknowledge that we are presenting our truth in the post-truth and post-human era where “truth” and “human” are multiplied myriad times. But we also acknowledge that we can neither deny nor avoid the issues of truth and human. Therefore, we situate our calling in within the [grounded perspectives](#) of Indigenous knowledge systems.

What we presented so far is truth telling as the *Siinqee* Institute sought and assembled it. [Truth](#) must be told before anything else because it marks the first step towards deeper processes of justice as healing. In the *siinqee* principles we uphold, truth telling represents the initial [calling out](#) of injustice. But calling out must be followed by [calling in](#).

Calling in represents the inseparably intertwined processes of acknowledging the injustice of the ripped fabric, processing accountability, and repairing relations of solidarity, mutual empathy, and reciprocal care. This begins the shared journey towards restoring the fundamental truth. This is necessarily a shared journey where many truths come together.

### *The Ripped Fabric*

What is the fundamental truth of the Karrayyu crisis? What social and cosmic fabric is being ripped here? And what is the injustice that is ripping it? Acknowledging the injustice starts here by naming it as we see it.

The Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders were massacred in broad daylight by forces emboldened by rising autocracy. The entrenching of one-party system in Ethiopia abhors the fundamental truth where diverse worldviews coexist in harmonious plurality. It abhors the checks and balances of egalitarian relationships. It suffocates aspirations of freedom and democracy.

This sort of trampling on the fundamental truth rips the cosmic fabric asunder. Once the cosmic fabric is ripped, the whole gamut of the social relations it fosters are ripped. Solidarity, mutual care, mutual empathy, and reciprocal care with the natural environment, all woven into the cosmic fabric are ripped to pieces. People are then pitted not only against each other but also against the natural environment.

The result is the ongoing all-out civil war waged to create a hierarchy of dominance over human relations and relations with the natural environment. It is a war on the fundamental truth of egalitarian relations fostered by *gadaa*. It is a war on the deepest aspirations of democracy and freedom among the diverse peoples of Ethiopia.

Indeed, this is a devastating war on the Indigenous *gadaa* values and principles of peacemaking and conflict resolution. Karrayyu truth tellers said that their *gadaa* leaders were murdered because they honored their *gadaa* values and preferred to make peace between the warring parties rather than pick a side and participate in the civil war.

It is a war where people are pitted against each other and against the natural environment. Karrayyu communities are invaded by their neighboring Amhara settlers who took their land and cut the precious trees they preserved for generations. It is a war on balanced ecosystems that regulate weather patterns and climate change, that is now a global crisis.

The Karrayyu nurtured respectful relations between humans and natural environment but that was torn apart within weeks of massacring the *gadaa* leaders in one cruel strike. The Karrayyu were betrayed, ironically by their own government that claims *gadaa* values. These are the social and the cosmic fabrics ripped in the Karrayyu crisis.

### *Acknowledgement*

At its simplest, acknowledgement means admitting the truth that injustice has occurred. But it is more complex and processual than a simple act of admitting. At its deepest and most complex, acknowledgement is a reflective response of simple humility to the enormity, depth, and complexity of the ripped cosmic fabric.

Ripping the cosmic fabric goes far beyond the ripped social fabric. How then can such deep wounds be soothed? How can the ripped relations be repaired? Where do we start the justice work towards restoring the fundamental truth?

Acknowledgement is a willfully humble acceptance of the raw wounds that just opened by the ripping violence. It requires calm courage to be able to see the truth of the violence in all its ugliness. It also requires a deep sense of solidarity and mutual empathy to see that the injury ripping the victims is also a deeply self-inflicting injury ripping perpetrators.

But acknowledgement is also processual and multilayered. It's a journey requiring deep critical reflection individually and collectively. It is the acknowledgement of the violence done to humans, to the land, and to the natural environment.

The acknowledgement of the depth of trauma, loss, and pain among the Karrayyu families and communities is the simplest first stage in the process. Yet even this first step does not fall from the sky. Governments do not willingly acknowledge their own atrocities. The pressure must come from the public and the media as well as non-governmental, local, and global civil society, human rights, and advocacy organizations.

The massacre of the Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders caused an uproar among some Oromo civic organizations and social media. Picking up the [breaking news](#) from Addis Standard, various mainstream and social media reported the tragedy and hosted a series of in-depth interviews with truth tellers. Oromia Media Network produced a truth-telling [documentary](#).

Advocacy organizations like Oromia Support Group [reported](#) details of the massacre. [Ija Oromia](#) conducted its own investigation and reported its findings. Oromo Global Council of Religions and Gumii Waaqeffannaa hosted a joint [day of remembrance](#). Karrayyu individuals from around the world cried out for justice. The *Siinqee* Institute joined this stream by calling on the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to investigate.

Together, all these created a moment of reckoning and truth telling. They all contributed to pressuring the government to give basic acknowledgement to the injustice. They called for independent investigation and to bring perpetrators to justice.

There were movements within the government itself where the initial denying of accountability gave way and officials started exposing each other. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released the [report](#) of its investigation, unequivocally naming the injustice as extrajudicial killing and the perpetrators as government security forces.

Following this, [Oromia police](#) held a press conference, giving acknowledgment and admitting that security forces perpetrated the massacre. At the same time, it announced that it is conducting its own investigation into the matter in relation to the murder of the eleven police officers and the many injured in the ambush by unidentified armed groups.

What remains unaddressed is acknowledgement as a willfully humble acceptance of wrongdoing that ripped the heart of social and cosmic fabrics. The Oromia government worked so hard against all odds to have [gadaa registered](#) at UNESCO. Officials went extra miles to collect 540 signatures, including signatures of Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders.

Something must have gone terribly wrong between valuing *gadaa* so deeply and turning around and massacring an entire *gadaa* leadership of *tuuta Michillee*. What went so wrong? It must be a deep crisis that ripped the social and cosmic fabrics asunder so terribly. And that must be acknowledged to embrace relational accountability.

### *Relational Accountability*

At its simplest, accountability means the act of owning up to the consequences of our actions. Like acknowledgment, accountability is a critical reflective response to the injustices we do as a failure of our ethical responsibilities and moral obligations.

At its deepest, relational accountability is being accountable to all our relations. It requires simple humility to take ownership of our biggest failures. It requires calm courage to face up to our actions when we cause harm or when we fail to protect those for whom we are responsible to protect. Such humble accountability fosters trust and respect both in individual public officials and in the government in general.

In our intimately interconnected and interdependent world, the threads of relational accountability are woven into various relations of community, local, regional, and national governments as well as international government of governments at the United Nations.



At the global level, the UN commitment to Responsibility to Protect comes with a tag of relational accountability when it fails in its duty to protect Karrayyu leaders and other innocent victims of their own governments.

Like acknowledgement, accountability is also layered, complex and processual. And the process is neither progressive nor linear, moving from less to more accountability as more evidence is assembled. As the Karrayyu massacre demonstrates, accountability takes a tortuous path back and forth between government acceptance, evasion, and reignited cover-up, even as evidence mounts [implicating](#) government beyond reasonable doubt.

### *Processing Accountability*

While members of the Karrayyu community know the truth that their *gadaa* leaders were rounded up, and massacred, imprisoned and tortured by government security forces, officials started out by denying and blaming the atrocity on those they called *Shanee*. Karrayyu truth tellers said, after federal officials exposed them, regional officials quietly (not publicly), acknowledged wrongdoing and apologized to Karrayyu community elders.

When renewed call on government to investigate and bring perpetrators to justice gained momentum, officials started looking for individual scapegoats. After the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released its report implicating security forces, [Oromia police](#) announced it was doing its own investigation, acknowledging the injustice but neither accepting nor denying accountability.

Where is the accountability? What we are witnessing instead is the coercion of Karrayyu elders to participate in government coverup and bury their own truth. Instead of seeking the truth, the government is seeking some scapegoats to absolve itself and keep the truth buried. This does not do justice as healing or repair the ripped relations. People jump to scapegoating perhaps because they can't see the deeper healing beyond retribution.

In the meantime, Karrayyu truth tellers said that the government was sending mediators to pay compensation to Karrayyu community. Elders sensed a cover-up attempt to bury their truth, as no perpetrator was held accountable or brought even to the basic level of justice. Members of their community were still being harassed, and some remained imprisoned. They said the shed blood of their massacred leaders still cry out for justice.

The tortuous paths that accountability takes between denying, accepting, backpedaling, scapegoating, evading, and covering up hints at the further ripping of the social and cosmic fabrics. With such tacit and blatant lack of accountability, members of the Karrayyu community lose respect for and trust in their primary public institutions that were supposed to protect them.

Without facilitating the basic level of justice through acknowledgement and accountability, compensation becomes hush money paid to bribe the Karrayyu community into burying its own truth. To heal their open wounds, people must tell their truth in all its ugliness.

However, scapegoating individual officials and dumping the blame on a few does not soothe the wound or mend the ripped fabric. Why? Because it individualizes and personalizes the deeply systemic problem. It conceals the roots and sources of the problem. It also conceals the restorative nature of Indigenous justice that seeks to mend relations and heal wounds. It limits justice to retribution via blame game and punishment.

Addressing systemic problems in the Indigenous way may be a long and arduous collective journey that may take generations. But, however long, this journey must start at the doors of accountability, honesty, humility, trust, and genuine willingness to pursue justice as healing. It is a collective restorative journey far beyond retributive justice.

Until then, the Karrayyu continue to cry out for justice. Within their *gadaa* system, they practice wholistic sense of justice as healing and restorative. In their [elaborate rituals](#) they perform conflict prevention, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peacemaking. They seek justice in the ways they understand and practice it as healing and restorative.

*We call upon*

We call upon the Oromia government to embrace the Karrayyu model of Indigenous justice as it offers an outstanding instructive model of accountability and conflict resolution. After all, the previous Oromia government worked hard and went [extra miles](#) to have *gadaa* registered as UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The current government can take this further from claiming *gadaa* to practicing *gadaa* accountability.

We call upon the federal government to embrace the Karrayyu model of Indigenous *gadaa* conflict resolution and peacemaking. This could prove to be more viable than retribution or marshalling military solutions to settle the escalating conflicts across the country. The Karrayyu model of accountability works not only for the effective redress of past atrocities but also for the active prevention of future conflicts.

We also call upon the government of governments at the UN and all its regional bodies and agencies to hold tight on their own threads of accountability, and to validate and support the Karrayyu model of accountability.

We call upon the public, the media, and the private sector. We call upon civil society, and nongovernmental organizations. We call upon advocacy and human rights organizations in Ethiopia and abroad to hold tight on to their ends of accountability.

If everyone in this interdependent world takes their share of ownership and accounts for their actions and inactions, we can help bring perpetrators to justice, and we can move beyond the limits of legal justice and trudge towards the wholistic sense of Indigenous restorative justice as healing.

Calling in requires people coming together from across differences and divisions and working together in mutual empathy. A key element in mutual empathy is holding oneself accountable as much as holding others accountable. Along with acknowledgment of injustice and accountability, calling in takes us into the areas of repairing tattered relations of solidarity and reciprocal care and towards mending the ripped fabrics.

### *Repairing Relations*

In its simplest and most linear layer, repairing relations is an arduous process that follows from the general acknowledgement of injustice and then securing the tortuous relational accountability of perpetrators.

In this layer, repairing relations involves repairing the direct relationship between victims and perpetrators, between government security forces and the Karrayyu community. Here the pursuit is bringing perpetrators to justice (which is often retributive) and awarding compensation to the families of victims and the Karrayyu community.

In its more complex layer, repairing relations is repairing the whole web of disrupted relations within the Karrayyu community, between them and their neighboring peoples, between them and the regional and federal governments, and between the governments and the government of governments, including UN bodies and agencies.

It is about healing Karrayyu relations with broader social and political institutions, with the larger public and the media that amplify or distort their truth, and with the advocacy and human rights organizations that speak for them or of them.

It is about intentionally and willfully repairing all our tattered relations by taking the Karrayyu crisis as a catalyst and rippling out into healing relations within larger communities and institutions as well as larger national and global societies.

It is about repairing harmful [relations of power](#) dictating how life and death are doled out, who is valued as human and who is not, who should be rescued and who should perish. It is about repairing hierarchical relations determining whose lives warrant protection and whose lives are disposable, whose losses are grievable and whose griefs are negligible, whose lives are worth compensating and which relations are worth repairing.

In its deepest layer, it is about repairing nurturing relations of solidarity, mutual empathy, and reciprocal care with humans and the natural environment. It is about repairing the tragically interrupted rhythms and cycles of *gadaa*. Beyond the disrupted Karrayyu lives and livelihoods, it is about repairing the ripped layers of deeper cosmic fabrics and inching towards restoring the fundamental truth of egalitarian relations and plural coexistence.

## *Broader Crisis*

In many ways, the Karrayyu crisis is a microcosm of the crisis in the broader Ethiopian society and beyond. More immediately, it reflects the predicament of Oromos across the country. The broader attacks on *gadaa* and the leadership cleansing of Oromo institutions discussed above are just two glaring examples.

Despite the intensity of its tragedy, however, the Karrayyu crisis also comes with opportunities, and holds out many possibilities of conflict resolution and deeper healing. Its potentials for repairing relations of solidarity, mutual empathy, and reciprocal care must be considered within this broader context of intertwined opportunities and crises.

In the broader crisis in Ethiopia, mass killing of Oromos both by government forces and by non-state actors is rampant. Under several states of emergency and media blackout, women are gang raped, hundreds of innocent civilians are quietly killed, including by government air and drone strikes. Tens of thousands of political prisoners languish in jails.

Hundreds of thousands are displaced by armed extremist groups and expansionists pushing from the Amhara Region. These groups are killing indiscriminately, burning homes and crops, taking land, and putting up welcome signs as in the Karrayyu area.

Overshadowed by the civil war in the north, most of these atrocities remain unreported. The international community, mainstream media, and international human rights groups are preoccupied by this war in the north. Here hundreds of thousands are killed. Millions are displaced and exposed to starvation with humanitarian access blocked.

But the general crisis is bigger than the war in the north. It rages on across the country. Many armed and vigilante groups, some trained and armed by federal and regional governments, routinely terrorize innocent civilians. Thousands are killed in communal violence and thousands more are displaced from homes and farms burnt to the ground.

Victims find no protection from the government. Officials quietly watch as lawlessness takes over. Either they are not willing or have no capacity to protect the victims. This signals a troubling breakdown of law and order although on the surface it seems that the militarist government is in control.

Feeding off the militarist repression of government, some political elites further deepen the crisis by deploying pervasive disinformation and malicious smear campaigns to gain cheap short term political scores. They are on collision course of mutual annihilation themselves and inciting ordinary folks to engage in mutual destruction.

Feeding off the deep fears of ordinary folks, some extreme nationalists even go as far as mass killing and displacing poor farmers to mobilize their co-ethnics against others. They play the dangerous game of emotionally arousing and pitting folks against each other. Political elites are arousing societal fear to incite full scale intercommunal violence.

Cultural institutions that used to hold together diverse communities are now extremely politicized. Institutions of arbitration cannot resolve disputes when ordinary folks are not only mobilized and polarized but also militarized. Even institutions of faith and spaces of worship are tragically politicized, and they pull folks apart instead of holding them together.

Unbridled hate speech by officials and extremist nationalist groups has polarized the society. Hate is publicly and venomously disseminated from faith institutions, mainstream and social media alike. As we witness the extreme polarization of ordinary citizens, the raw horror that the Rwanda genocide might repeat itself in Ethiopia looms large.

What is surfacing from the depth of the current intense conflict is the neglected historical wounds of conquest through which diverse peoples were incorporated into the Ethiopian state. Instead of redressing the injustice and healing the wounds, however, centuries-old denial of justice is reasserting itself as people continue to demand justice.

The unprecedented level of social militarization signals continued communal violence, and it is reinforced by the general militarization of the society. The civil war continues even as mediation efforts are underway. The staggering defense budget just announced by the federal government is a menacing signal that the war will continue.

What can stop the polarizing hate and the devastating war that reinforce each other? With a government that seeks military solutions for differences, and with a society so polarized and militarized to feed the war machine, where do we start repairing the tattered relations?

### *National Dialogue*

The deepening national crisis has reignited the call for a national dialogue. This call was loud when the years of peaceful protests brought down the previous repressive government in 2018. In the euphoria many called for national dialogue and reconciliation to transition from repression to a semblance of democracy.

However, that call was muted as the euphoria dimmed and the country started sliding down the slippery slope of renewed military repression, further descending into civil war. Under the current military repression, the peaceful protests that enabled this government to power is a far cry. The deep historical wound of conquest has no space to heal as the centuries-old demands of justice by Ethiopia's diverse peoples is muted.

The current unprecedented and pervasive national crisis has revived the muted calls for national dialogue. The historical wound of conquest is presenting itself for redress and the Karrayyu crisis is offering an exceptional opportunity for the country to redeem itself.

Pressure is already on for all parties to silence the guns and give peace a chance. National dialogue is now the buzzword, an [all-inclusive](#) dialogue. Mending the severely ripped social and cosmic fabrics for sustainable peace can start here with the all-inclusive national dialogue.

Pressed by the pervasive call for inclusive national dialogue, Ethiopia responded. The Council of Ministers approved and [Parliament](#) passed the proclamation establishing an independent National Consultative Commission and [unveiled](#) a list of 42 nominees.

Many hoped that the commission would bring together Ethiopians from across their irreconcilable aspirations, contradictory political views, and a polarized general population. But the challenges are already too many.

The nomination to the commission is obviously not inclusive, and many have offered constructive critique for more inclusivity. The commission is elitist, composed of doctors, professors, and scholars for the large part, thus excluding ordinary citizens. It is mostly older generation, thus excluding younger citizens. It is mostly men, thus excluding women. And it is mostly Amhara and Oromo, thus excluding the other peoples of Ethiopia.

For [Somali](#), [Oromo](#), and [Ogaden](#) opposition political parties, and organizations of the Oromo [diaspora](#), the commission is not independent or free of government influence; it is partial, [unrepresentative](#), and its process lacks transparency. They call for a more inclusive commission convened by a more credible and neutral convener.

And they all underscore the release and inclusion of all political prisoners unfairly jailed for their political views. And they call for the inclusion of Tigray Defense Forces and Oromo Liberation Army, both unfairly designated as terrorists. The UN joins in with affirmation and encourages the government to hold talks with [all stakeholders](#), thus underscoring the crucial importance of a [national dialogue](#).

Others accuse that the government created the commission as a [gimmick](#) for deceiving the international community and easing the diplomatic pressure while at the same time continuing to prepare for war. The commission has triggered a hot debate with some arguing that the national dialogue [can unify](#) the divided nation, others asserting that it [cannot deliver](#) inclusive peace, and still others taking it apart and [analyzing](#) it.

These debates and critiques open a great opportunity for going beyond the political divides and repairing nurturing relations of solidarity, mutual empathy, and reciprocal care with humans and the natural environment. Together, they create space for truth telling and deeper healing which puts the Karrayyu truth on the [long road](#) towards reconciliation.

### *Truth and Reconciliation*

Ethiopia is unique in its historical, political, cultural, and demographic context. However, it is not alone in experiencing such extreme societal conflict. It can draw lessons from societies that had created truth and reconciliation processes to step back in collective critical reflection and mend their ripped relations. These processes have helped other societies and communities to take a deep look at themselves and repudiate what they did and say never again.

South American countries initiated [truth commissions](#) in the 1970s to deal with the aftermath of extreme societal conflicts and transition to a semblance of democracy. Since then, many countries have variously imagined truth and reconciliation. [South Africa](#) and [Rwanda](#) engaged it as post-conflict transitional justice while [Australia](#) and [Canada](#) tended more towards disrupting centuries of denial, building trust, and healing ripped relations.

In Ethiopia, there are currently several initiatives variously imagining and engaging truth and reconciliation. Happening in a deeply divided nation that has never allowed itself to collectively step back and reflect on its historical legacy, these first steps are already fraught with high expectations and daunting challenges.

Despite these challenges, there have been [ongoing initiatives](#) to bring people together and support the process of reform and transition since the peaceful protests forced the previous government out of power in 2018. Initiatives like [Destiny Ethiopia](#) also brought together various political parties, activists, and opinion leaders to imagine the Ethiopia they wished to see. They created several scenarios of their visions for Ethiopia's future.

[MIND Ethiopia](#), a Multistakeholder Initiative for National Dialogue, improved on Destiny Ethiopia by bringing together individuals from seven governmental and nongovernmental national organizations to restore peace and facilitate an [all-inclusive](#) national dialogue. This is deemed the only way out, especially when [irreconcilable aspirations](#) and divergent imaginations of Ethiopia polarize the polity and escalate the crisis.

All these initiatives, and the critiques and debates on national dialogue notwithstanding, at least three basic pieces of the puzzle are missing or concealed. We say "at least three" to highlight the three missing puzzle pieces that are important to us, and to acknowledge the basic truth that no group or initiative can fully or wholly include everyone.

First, absent from all these dialogical spaces are the Karrayu and their *gadaa* relational model of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, reconciliation, peacemaking, and ways of healing the deeply ripped fabrics of political, social, cultural, and cosmic relations.

What is missing is the deep wells of the Indigenous knowledge systems from which the *gadaa* model draws. What is being sidelined is perhaps one of the most treasured and refined knowledge systems distilled through many thousands of years and many insightful generations of humans. How can the Karrayu truth start down the road to reconciliation?

However tragic, the Karrayu massacre holds out possibilities for rethinking our ways. It offers an instructive textbook example of understanding the depths and complexities of the atrocity but also of possibilities of imagining healing as justice and restorative.

Secondly, absent from these dialogical spaces is *siinqee* women's knowledge, women's ways of knowing and being in the world. Although keyed into the *gadaa* knowledge system and draws from the same deep wells, women become women differently from men. As neatly outlined in the Oromia government's [submission](#) to UNESCO, women's separate sets of roles and responsibilities are essential to the very functioning of *gadaa*.

What is missing, therefore, is women's ways of knowing and becoming women – the tacit knowledge systems and the mundane practices through which they become women. A few women are included in these initiatives of national dialogue, but we see this as inclusion by exclusion. The women are included but the knowledge systems and practices of mundane living through which they become women are excluded or sidelined.

Thirdly, absent from these dialogical spaces is the deepening crisis and current concerns of global warming, climate change, and environmental protection. Extreme and rapid climate change has reached unprecedented levels and the [ramifications](#) are catastrophic.

Increasingly extreme droughts, floods, and heat waves are not simply natural disasters. They are partly attributable to human activities. Yet the world finds it hard to agree on a climate policy. It is baffling that climate is not a candidate for national dialogue in our initiatives, even as severe and prolonged drought is wiping out livestock and crops, putting [5.7 million people](#) in need of food assistance.

What is missing is the knowledge base that underscores the intimate relationship between the domination of humans and the domination of the natural environment. Missing are the relations of mutual empathy and reciprocal care with nature. What is concealed is the political play that whose knowledge is allowed into the national dialogue and whose is excluded is intimately related to whose life is valued and whose life is left to perish.

### *In Conclusion*

Considering the Karrayyu crisis, all these initiatives constitute important pathways and steppingstones towards an all-inclusive process of truth and reconciliation. On their own, however, they are not enough to repair the deeply ripped relations. Nor can they serve justice as healing or bring sustainable peace.

This calls for other excluded systems of knowledge and ways of being in the world to come to the fore and start the collective reflective journey towards truth and reconciliation. The Karrayyu *gadaa* can be included as an Indigenous model that can facilitate healing and reconciliation where even irreconcilable aspirations can coexist.

The Karrayyu massacre and the ensuing severe disruption to the rhythms of their *gadaa* cycles is unprecedented. It is rooted in long intergenerational historical trauma. Building trust, repairing relations, and healing such trauma takes many generations. And Karrayyu healing must happen within the broader context involving all deeply tattered relations.

Beyond the Karrayyu, the broader crisis plaguing Ethiopia also takes generations to heal. The brutal mass killing and displacement of innocent civilians, the cruelty of gang raping women and girls, the heartless starving of vulnerable humans, the public execution of innocent victims, neighbor-on-neighbor massacre of intercommunal violence, leaving human victims for the feast of wild animals, all make it extremely difficult to rebuild trust.



Restorative justice focused on healing people from all these atrocities and deep historical traumas necessitates an all-inclusive truth and reconciliation process facilitated by an independent body. The Ethiopian government cannot facilitate this after taking a strong partisan stance and fighting the civil war on one side of an extremely polarized society.

*We call upon*

We call upon UNESCO to publicly denounce the heinous massacre of Karrayyu *gadaa* leaders and help bring perpetrators to justice. After all they are embodiments and custodians of its Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

We call upon UNESCO to enact its commitment to cultural diversity and equal dignity of all cultures and draw attention to the necessity of establishing a truth and reconciliation process where the Karrayyu *gadaa* Indigenous knowledge is included.

We call upon the international community to intervene and facilitate the establishment of an all-inclusive truth and reconciliation process that works in tandem with the existing initiatives of national dialogue but with a focus on healing historical trauma, reconciliation, and sustainable peace. We call upon them to create a forum where all participants have equal opportunity to share their truths without fear, shame, or guilt.

We call upon regional and federal governments of Ethiopia to acknowledge the depth and complexity of the ripped fabric and facilitate accountability with all their relations. We call upon them to approach this with humility and calm courage and take ownership of the consequences of their actions and inactions. We call upon them to embrace independent initiatives to facilitate healing and restore the fundamental truth of egalitarian relations.

We call upon federal and regional governments to curb the escalating hate speech, silence the guns, and stop the impending catastrophe. We call upon them to acknowledge that the unbridled hate speech is dangerously edging towards full scale intercommunal violence. We call upon them to avert the Rwanda experience of genocide in Ethiopia.

We call upon those currently facilitating the various initiatives of the national dialogue to broaden their inclusion criteria and embrace the treasures of Indigenous knowledge systems, like Karrayyu's, and women's knowledge. We call upon them to support and collaborate with an independent truth and reconciliation initiative working towards restorative justice and sustainable peace.

Finally, we call upon the public, the media, activists, political parties, human rights and nongovernmental organizations, and the business sector to support the various initiatives of national dialogue. We call upon them to urge their governments to support the creation of an independent truth and reconciliation initiative and facilitate justice as healing. Calling in requires the coming together of people from divergent positions and perspectives.

## **Annex – Names and Gadaa Titles**

### **Gadaa Leaders Murdered on December 1, 2021**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gadaa Title</b>	<b>Type of Atrocity</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Kadiiroo Hawaas Boruu	Abbaaa Bokkuu	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
2	Boruu Goodanaa Boruu	Tuuta Abbaa Bokkuu	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
3	Jiloo Dhaddoo Jiloo	Tuuta Abbaa Bokkuu	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
4	Bulaa Fantaallee Hawaas	Jaarsa Eddoo Gadaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
5	Bulga Boruu Hawaas	Miseensa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
6	Hawee Roobaa Waaqayyo	Manguddoo warra Gadaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
7	Jiloo Diidoo Fantaallee	Abbaa Duulaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
8	Boruu Fantaallee Jiloo	Abbaa Duulaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
9	Fantaallee Boruu Galaasoo	Qaalluu Goodaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
10	Boruu Fantaallee Boru	Qaalluu Goodaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
11	Qumbii Gurraacha Dhaddacho	Qaalluu Goodaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
12	Fantaallee Waaqayyo Dagalee	Warra Ulfina	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
13	Odaa Carcar Odaa	Qaalluu Goodaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
14	Boruu Jiloo Boruu	Qaalluu Goodaa	Summary Execution	1 December 2021
15	Jiloo Boorrayyuu Hawaas	Tuuta Gadaa	Tortured to death in custody	8 December 2021
			Body released to family after 4 days in cell	12 December 2021

### **Gadaa Leaders Released on December 30, 2021**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gadaa Title</b>	<b>Type of Atrocity</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Bayyanaa Jiloo	Jajjabii Eddoo/Mooraa Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 - 30 December 2021
2	Sambatuu Hawaas Bulgaa	Jajjabii Eddoo Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 - 30 December 2021
3	Hawwee Qumbii Boruu	Qaalluu Goodaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 - 30 December 2021
4	Jiloo Madoo Jiloo	Warra Bokkuu	Imprisonment, torture	1 - 30 December 2021
5	Roobaa Jiloo Didoo	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 - 30 December 2021
6	Nuuraa Tunna	Qaalluu Goodaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 - 30 December 2021

### Gadaa Leaders Released on January 22, 2022

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gadaa Title</b>	<b>Type of Atrocity</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Mi'eessoo Boruu Waaqayyo	Jajjabii Eddoo/Mooraa Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
2	Roobaa Boruu Daduu	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
3	Gadaa Boruu Daduu	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
4	Odaa Hawaas Odaa	Warra Ulfina	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
5	Boruu Carcar Odaa	Qaalluu Goodaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
6	Mi'eessoo Jiloo	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
7	Hawaas Waaqayyo Dagalee	Warra jilaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
8	Qumbii Baqqalaa Abbaa Diidoo	Warra Bokkuu	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
9	Qumbii Boruu Jiloo	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
10	Gobbuu Hawilee Boorayyuu	Abbaa Sabbataa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
11	Waariyoo Roobaa Waaqoo	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
12	Odaa Matikkee	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
13	Jiloo Guutoo Jiloo	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
14	Mi'eessoo Makuraa Boorayyuu	Qaalluu Goodaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
15	Roobaa Hawaas Tarraacaa	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22
16	Qumbii Boruu Diinaa	Tuuta Gadaa	Imprisonment, torture	1 Dec 21 to 22 Jan 22