



## **Organization for Victims and Survivors**

**A**

### **Survey Report on the Somali Region Mass Graves**

**December, 2022**

## **Jigjiga, Somali Region**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Background**

Somali region is one of the Ethiopia's 11 regional states, the largest in land mass with an estimated population of 8-9 million, inhabited by the third largest ethnic group after Oromo and Amhara. And it is one of the least developed regions in the country.

Since the British colony left the Ogaden region and Hawd area and ceded to Ethiopia in 23 September 1948 and 28 February 1955 respectively, the region has been embroiled in a war for independence and sovereignty. Narsullah, WSLF and the recent ONLF are remembered liberation fronts for their struggles in the region over the last half century.

Since the occupation, the people of the region were subjected to widespread violence and human right violations and the past 10 years of Abdi Mohamud Omer (Abdi Iley) were exceptional. Killing, robbery, rape, arrests and humiliation have become part of daily life for residents in the area. The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the last and longest operating front bitterly fought against Ethiopian administration since 1994 has signed a peace agreement with the current Ethiopian administration led by Abiy Ahmed in Asmara, Eritrea on October 21, 2018. This has come after heavy casualties and loss of many lives from both sides. The essence of the agreement was allowing that ONLF could peacefully and constitutionally continue its struggle for independence.

At the same year, on 6/8/2018, the Somali regional administration led by Abdi Mohamud Omar (Abdi Iley) reign ended. And in August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, new government was established Mustafe Muhumed Omar inaugurated as the President of the region.

#### **The Current situation of the Region**

The region is relatively peaceful, freedom of speech improved, all the political parties are safely operating, the government's development activities are smoothly going on, and the business activities are performing better than yester years, people to people movement and community interaction increased. However, in the last 10 years, the regional Judiciary and executive branches become more integrated and this eased the uncountable human right violations taken place in the whole region. So, building a transparent justice system could provide solutions and credible legal services to the victims and the perpetrators. But, the process of reforming the justice sector seems to be very slow.

Families who lost their loved ones are still waiting a credible judiciary system that they can file their complaints and bring the perpetrators to the court.

### **Association for Somali Region Victims and Survivors**

The Organization for Victims and Survivors (OVS) is a local organization established in April 2019 by former Jail Ogaden and Bayahow prisoners, including other victims and survivors of gross human rights violations in the Somali Region. The organization primarily advocates for the needs and rights of victims and survivors, in terms of their resettlement and rehabilitation, physical and psycho-social wellbeing, and to contribute to sustainable justice and peace in the Somali region.

To this end, OVS conducted preliminary survey on the mass graves in Somali region where many civilians killed during the conflict between ONLF and Ethiopian government were buried. Every place buried more than 5 people killed at once is recognized as mass grave in this survey.

### **Findings**

Findings of the survey revealed that civilians were killed regardless of their age. 90 years old and 12 years old are among the massacred and the average age was 36 years old. Both sexes were killed and female constitute 10% of the people killed during the conflict. These people were not members of the armed rebel force, 58% were pastoralist, 19% were farmers and 9% were students. The mass graves covered in these survey located for zones in Somali and the number of people killed in each zone is; Jarar (121), Fafan (93), Korahey (46) and Dollo (37). Results show all the people in each mass grave were killed at once. Victim families reported that 36.5% of the people were killed for unknown reason, 31% suspicion on supporting secessionist ideology, 17% for being Somalis, 11.5% ONLF cells in the community and other 4% were killed because of being a relative of ONLF members. 63.5% of the people were massacred by the Liyu Police and the rest 26.5 were killed by the Ethiopian defense forces. The people were killed in different manners including Gun shooting (89%), slaughtering (5%) and hanging with rope (3%) among others. The survey results show that all the survey covered people were killed in one decade starting from 2004 to 2013 and more than half were killed in three consecutive years 2010, 2011 and 2012. 79% of them responded there are other mass graves and 21% told the visited one is the only mass grave in their locality. The survey findings show that all 100% families and relatives of the killed reported they never got Diya/compensation from the government or other bodies. The other worrisome finding of the survey is that none of the perpetrators asked forgiveness to the victim households. All of the victim families (100%) reported that they didn't file their complaints to the court and this is mainly due to their low confidence in the judiciary system. All the respondents reported that they are morally damaged and traumatized due to the killing of their family members. 80% of them revealed the killing resulted social breakdown and weakened the social harmony in their locality. 61% of the victims told they are living with fear

and terror since the killing of their family members. More than 50% of them indicated their productivity decreased as a result of these massacres. The report also reveals that 85% of the victim's demand fair judiciary service for their loved ones and perpetrators brought to justice.

## **Recommendations**

### **To the Somali Regional State (SRS) government**

- Provision of credible transitional justice that can be trusted and bring the perpetrators to the court.
- Encourage victim families to file a complaint of their cases to the court and raise public awareness on government's readiness to hold perpetrators accountable.
- Government and other stakeholders should develop and adopt affirmative action for the victim household's members in accessing economic and social opportunities
- Financial institutions should facilitate credit /loans to the victim families who faced economic destruction and low productivity to start income generation activities.
- To heal the trauma and pain of the victims, government should initiate and fund genuine reconciliation process in the region.

### **To Federal Government of Ethiopia**

- Ethiopian government has to take the responsibility of all the massacres and atrocities committed by the different levels of government forces including ENDF and Liyu police.
- It should also initiate and take the most significant role in recovery, rehabilitation and reconciliation programs in the region and contribute victim's economic and social wellbeing.

### **To Development Partners and Local NGOs**

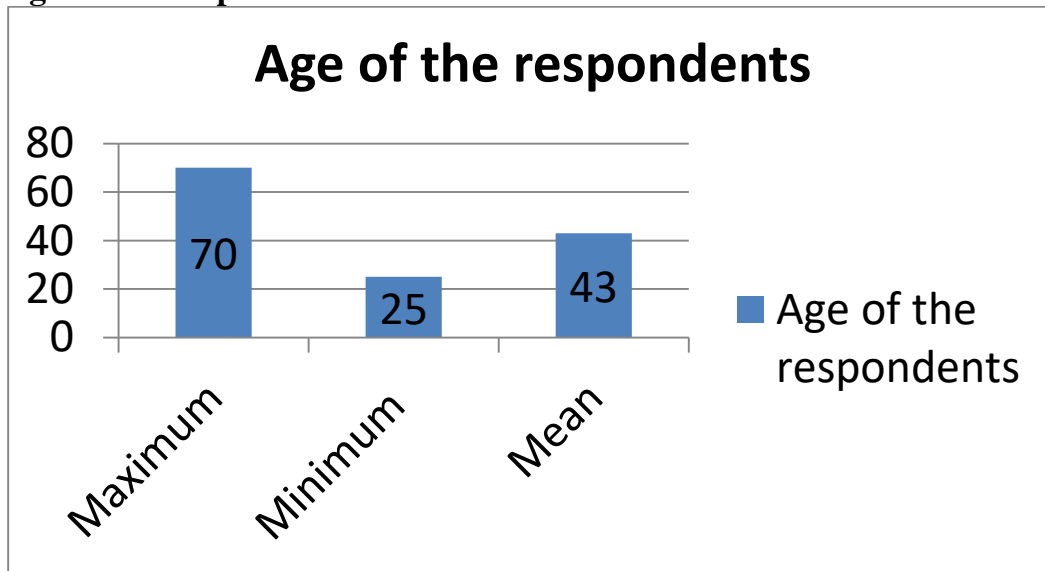
- Humanitarian and development Partners in the region as well as international NGOs are advised to initiate projects that could help the victim families to recover mentally, physically and economically.

### **To Ethiopian Human Rights Commission**

- This report and other similar surveys have to be published for recording and to avoid repeating same atrocities and human right violation in the near and distant future.
- EHRC has to take the primary responsibility of an open and in-depth investigation about the human rights violation in general and the mass graves in Somali regions in particular.

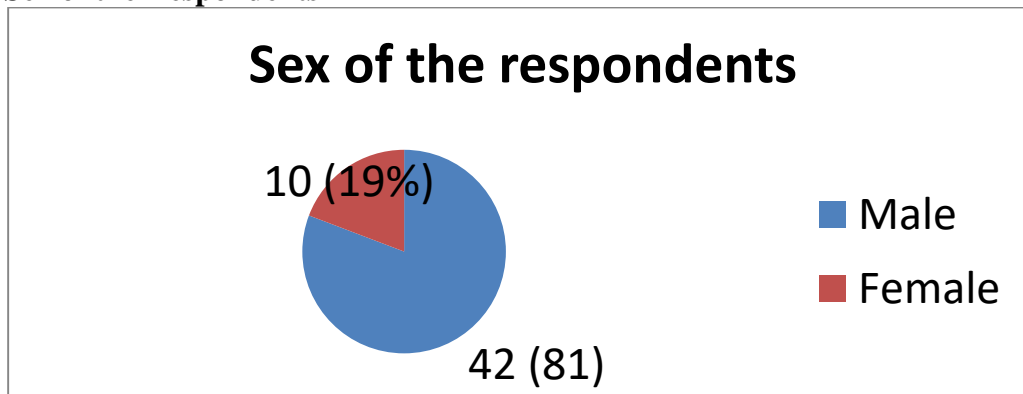
## Survey Findings

### Age of the Respondents



The respondents of the survey were from four different zones of Somali region namely Fafan, Jarar, Dollo and Korahey and their average age was 43. According to the survey results the oldest respondent was 70 years old and the youngest being 25 years old. This shows that, the respondents were almost mature during the events and also there are no extremely old people included in the interview.

### Sex of the Respondents



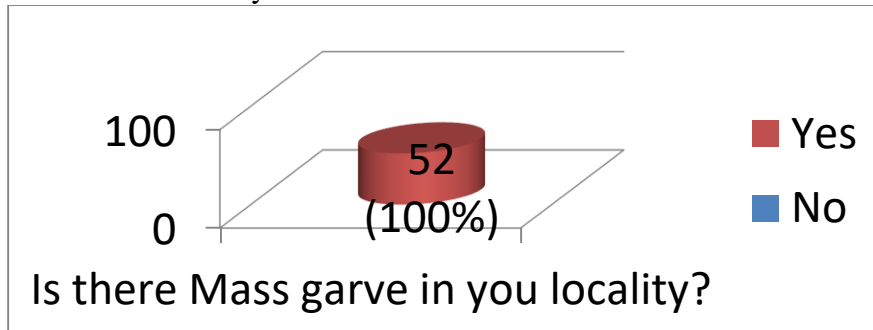
The data reveals that both sexes were included in the survey, however, majority of the respondents are male. Female constitute 19% of the respondents while the remaining 81% are

male. The male majority is mainly caused due to many men witnessed during the mass killing and the selected respondents were all survivors or witness during the incidents.

### Mass graves

The respondents were asked whether there are mass graves in their locality and they all responded yes. The mass graves reported in every survey covered locality and visited by the data collectors are shown in the below table. The table also clearly shows the name of the mass grave, name of the woreda/district, name of zone and the number of people buried in it.

246 members of people killed were found by their full names during the survey. Some others are not found mainly due to being non-permanent residents of the area and the respondents couldn't name them correctly.

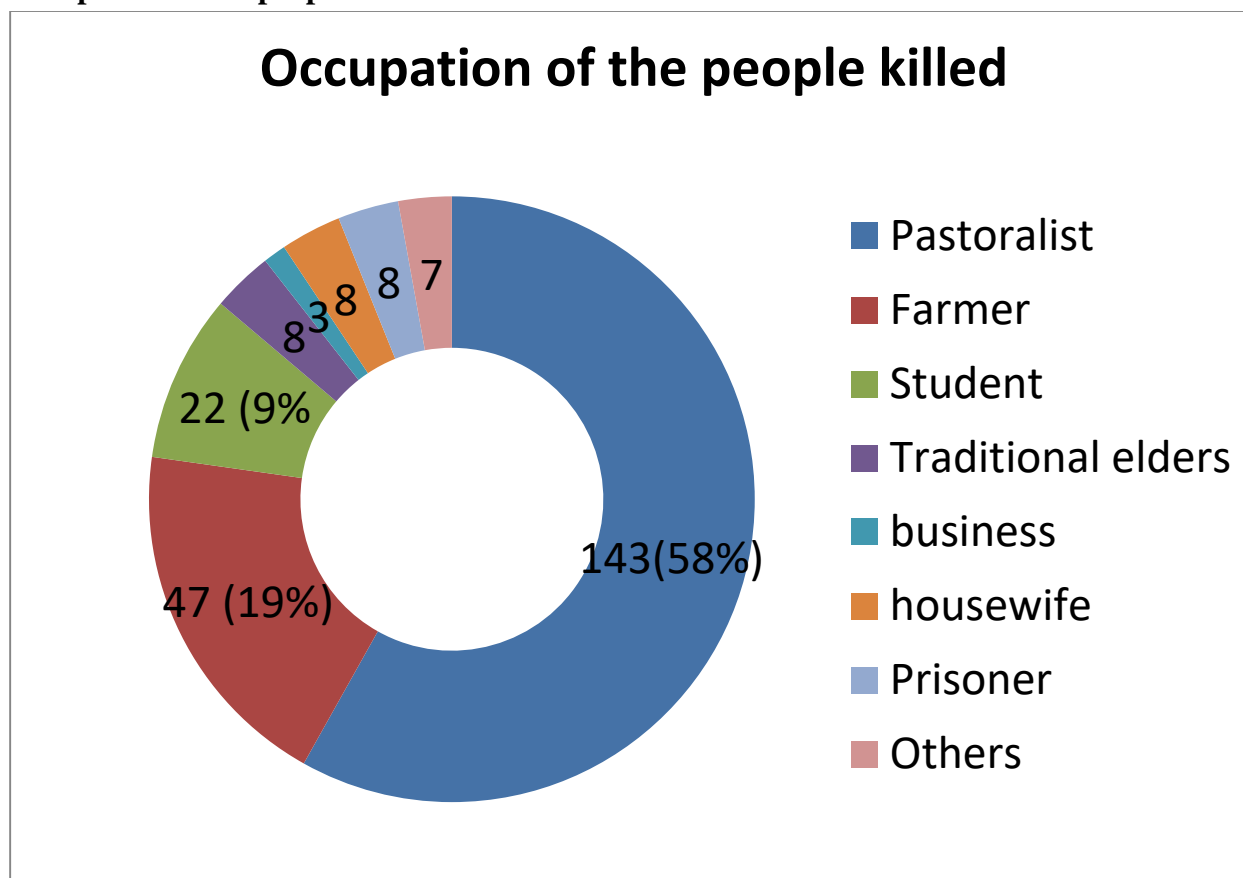


**Table1. Mass graves, locality and number of people buried in it**

Name of the grave	woreda/ Zone	Number of people buried
Abshiro	Gunagado, Jarar Zone	11
Baarta	Awaare, Jarar Zone	7
Dig	Dig, Jarar Zone	5
Degahmadaw	Degahmadaw, Jarar Zone	40
Qolad	Birqod, Jarar Zone	9
Mooyaha	Ararso, Jarar Zone	36
<b>Total Jarar Zone</b>		<b>108</b>
Ton'eley	Marsin, Korahey Zone	4
Iskudhonley	Marsin, Korahey Zone	11
waylolagihidh	Marsin, Korahey Zone	6
Daremo	Goglo-Kudunbur, Korahey Zone	5
Dhure	Goglo-Kudunbur, Korahey Zone	5
habalo-Jano	Kebridahar, Korahey Zone	21
<b>Total Korahey Zone</b>		<b>52</b>
Hareri-hagle	Danot, Dollo Zone	11
bambase	Danot, Dollo Zone	8
ugas yasin	Wardher, Dollo Zone	12

Wafdhug	Wardher, Dollo Zone	6
<b>Total Dollo Zone</b>		<b>37</b>
Buladari	Shabelley, Fafan Zone	25
Kebribayah	Kebribayah, Fafan Zone	12
Bafayowga	Goljano, Fafan Zone	9
Malqaqa	Goljano, Fafan Zone	40
Dariih	Goljano, Fafan Zone	7
<b>Total Fafan Zone</b>		<b>93</b>

### Occupation of the people killed



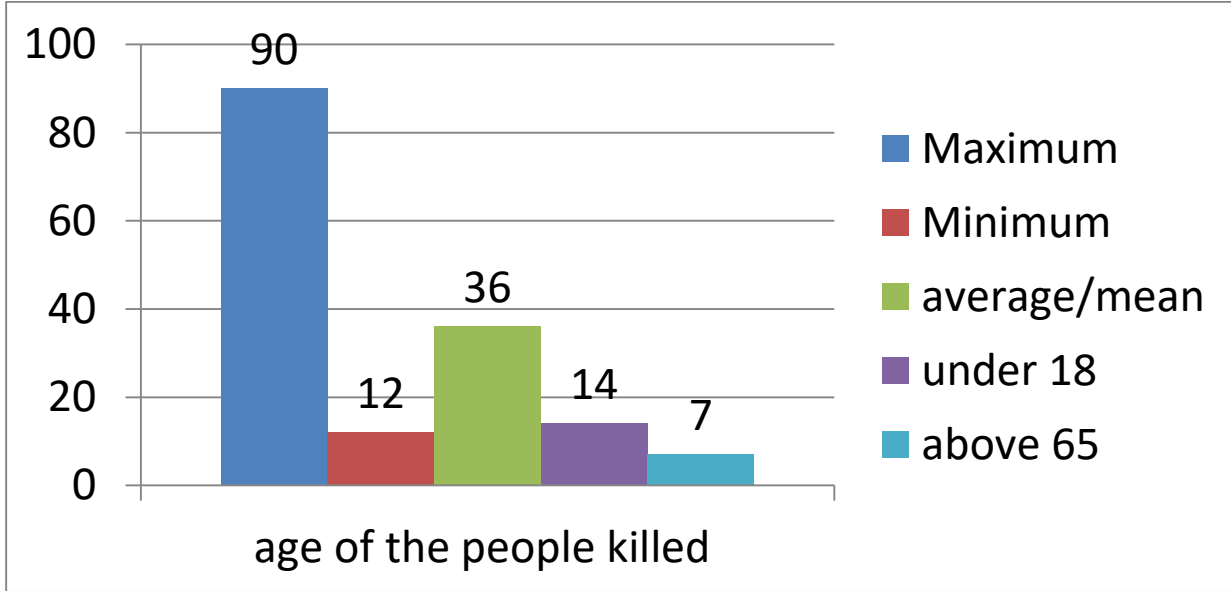
The survey investigated the occupation of the people killed and buried in the mass graves to understand which segment of the society was massacred mainly.

The results revealed that, 58% of the people killed were pastoralist and this group constitutes more than half, seconded by farmers 19% of the killed and thirdly, students 9% and followed by traditional leaders, house wives and prisoners equally.

Pastoralist, farmers and students constitute 86% the people killed, while community traditional leaders were also targeted.

This shows that none of the massacred people were armed rebel force of freedom fighters of ONLF rather they were civilians massacred indiscriminately regardless of their age, sex and social roles.

**Age of the people killed**



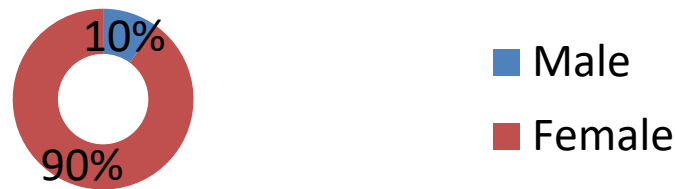
The people killed are of all ages ranging from 90 to 12 years old. The average age was 36 years old. The under age children killed were 14 while 7 above 65 years old were also included. This indicated the killing was regardless of age and all the categories and different ages were killed. Children and elder people are untouched segment of the society during the war, however the untouchables were touched.

The most important point to note is that, majority of the people killed were in between 20 to 45 years old the most precious and productive age of the life where they could achieve their dreams and contribute their household's wealth and social wellbeing. These killing negatively affected the economic and social well-being of the victim households and the community at large.

**Sex of the people killed**

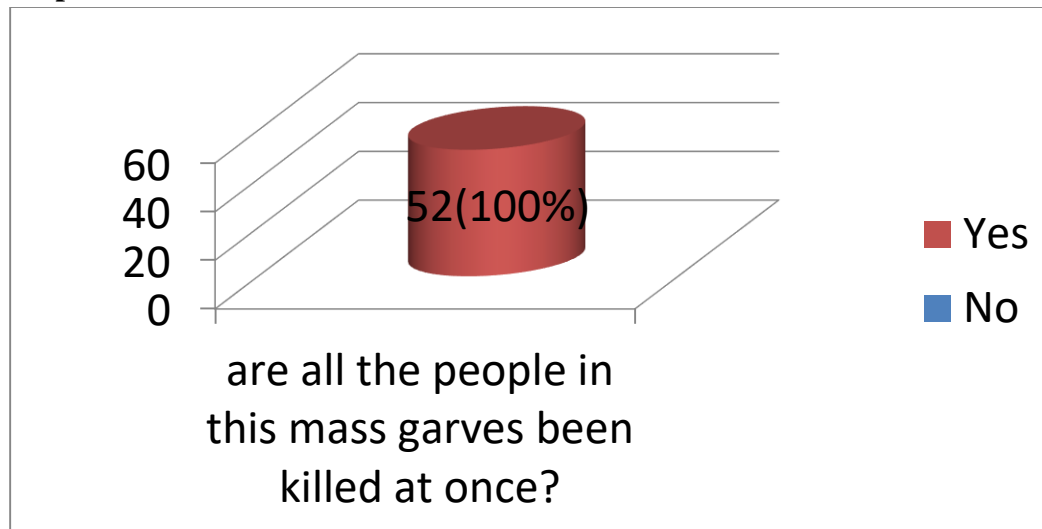


## Sex of the people killed



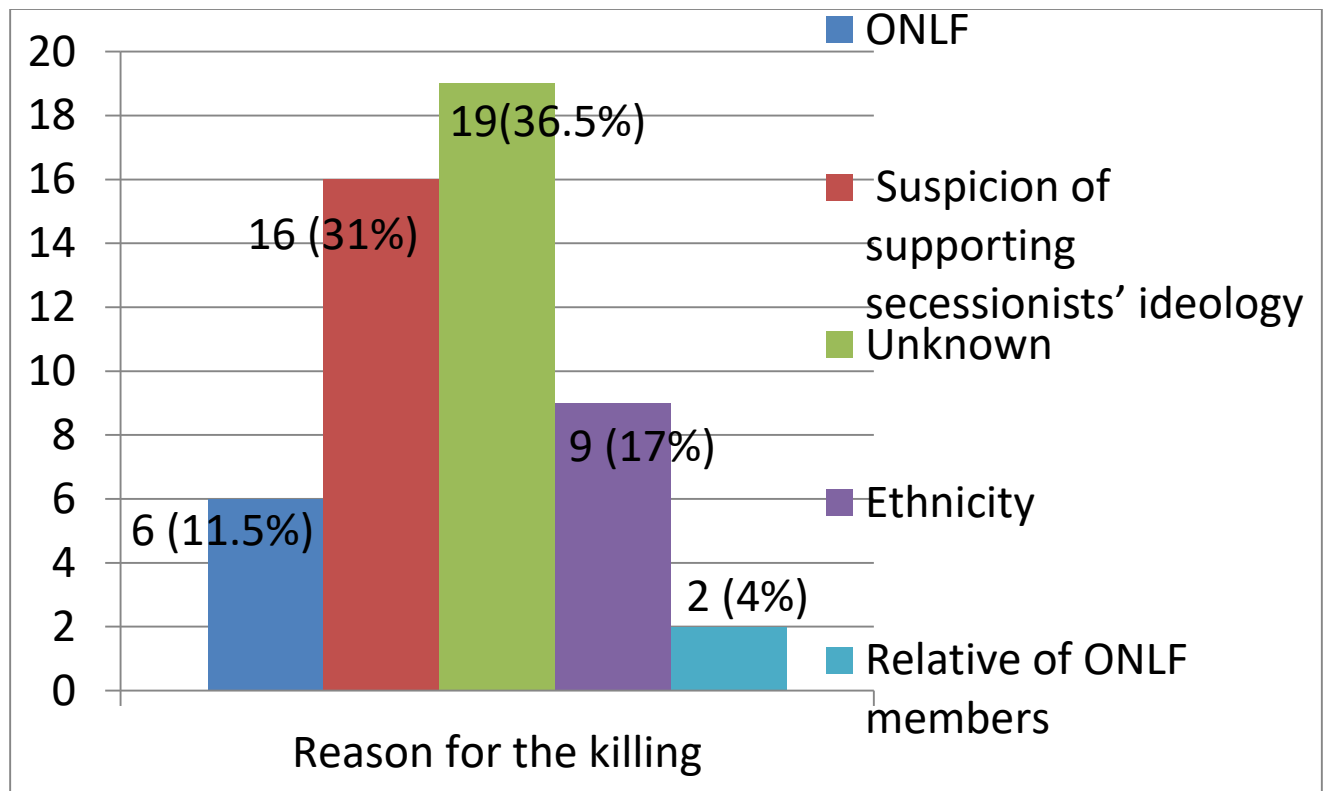
According to the survey findings, the killing was sexless and women and men were both killed in every corner of the mass graves visited. The society respect women during the war knowing that women do not usually involve the conflicts, the burden they bear and their vulnerability to the crisis. However, in Somali region's protracted conflict women were killed as same as men. They constitute 10% of the people killed and buried in the survey covered mass graves and the rest 90% are male.

## People killed at once



The report also shows that all the people in each mass grave were killed at once. 100% the survey respondents told that there is no mass grave buried people killed different times. Mass grave of each locality were buried by number people massacred at once in that area. This indicates large numbers of people were killed at once as the survey recognizes mass grave "every place buried more than five people who are killed at once".

## Reason for the killing

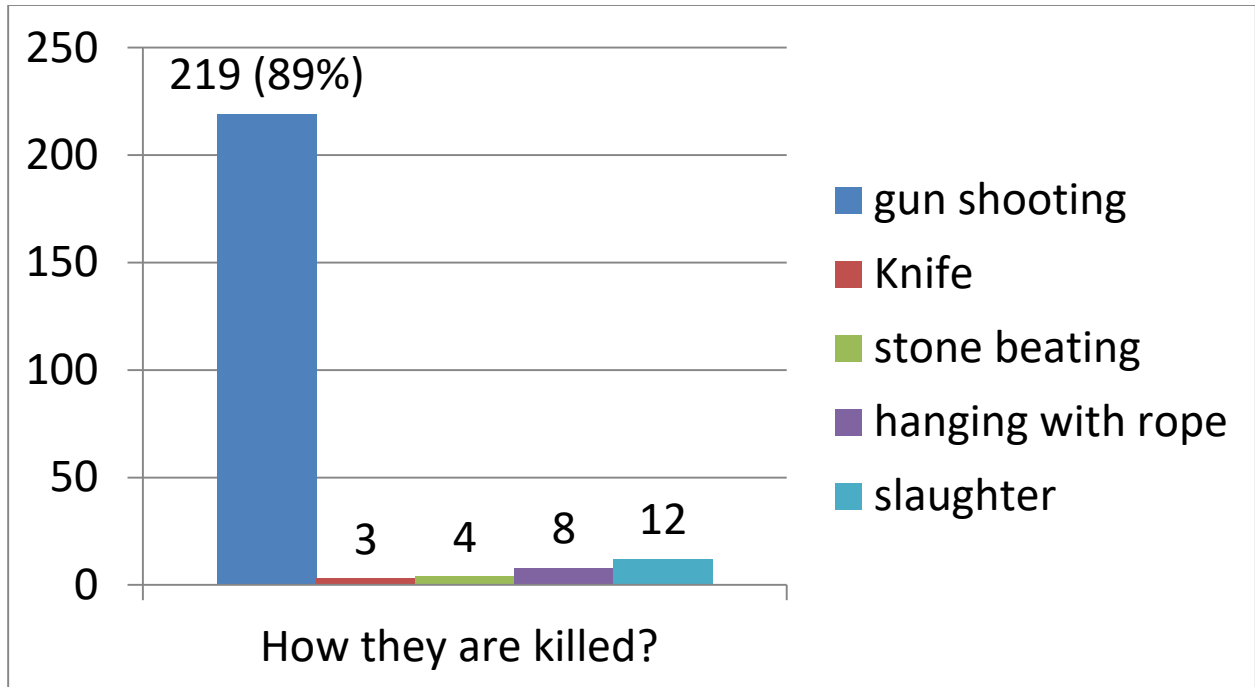


It is known that during the killing of these people, there was an active armed conflict between Ogaden National Liberation Front ONLF and government of Ethiopia and it was the main cause of these massacres and other atrocities occurred in the region. In this regard, the respondents were asked if there is a known reason for the killing. The survey findings revealed results different from the expectations.

The respondents told that 36.5% of the people were killed for no known reason and they were just killed while they are in their locality and doing their daily life activities. Next to that, 31% of them were killed for the suspicion of being supporters of secessionist ideology. Other 17% of them reported the killing was due to their ethnicity and (being Somalis". Only 11.5 were killed for the allegation of ONLF supporter or cells in the community. And the rest 4% were relatives of ONLF members.

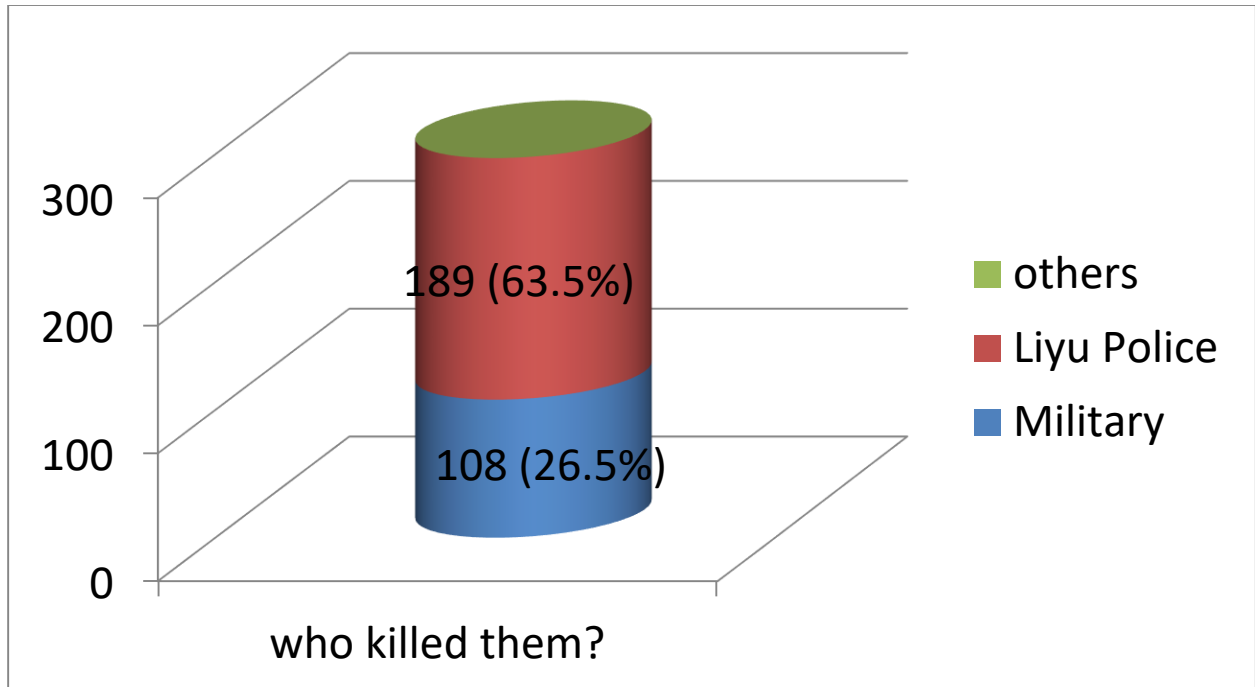
This clearly indicates, the victims were civilians mainly pastoralists and farmers and they had nothing to do with the warring sides. The other point to note is that, all the survey covered mass graves were buried people killed by the government forces (Military and Liyu Police)

#### **How they are killed**



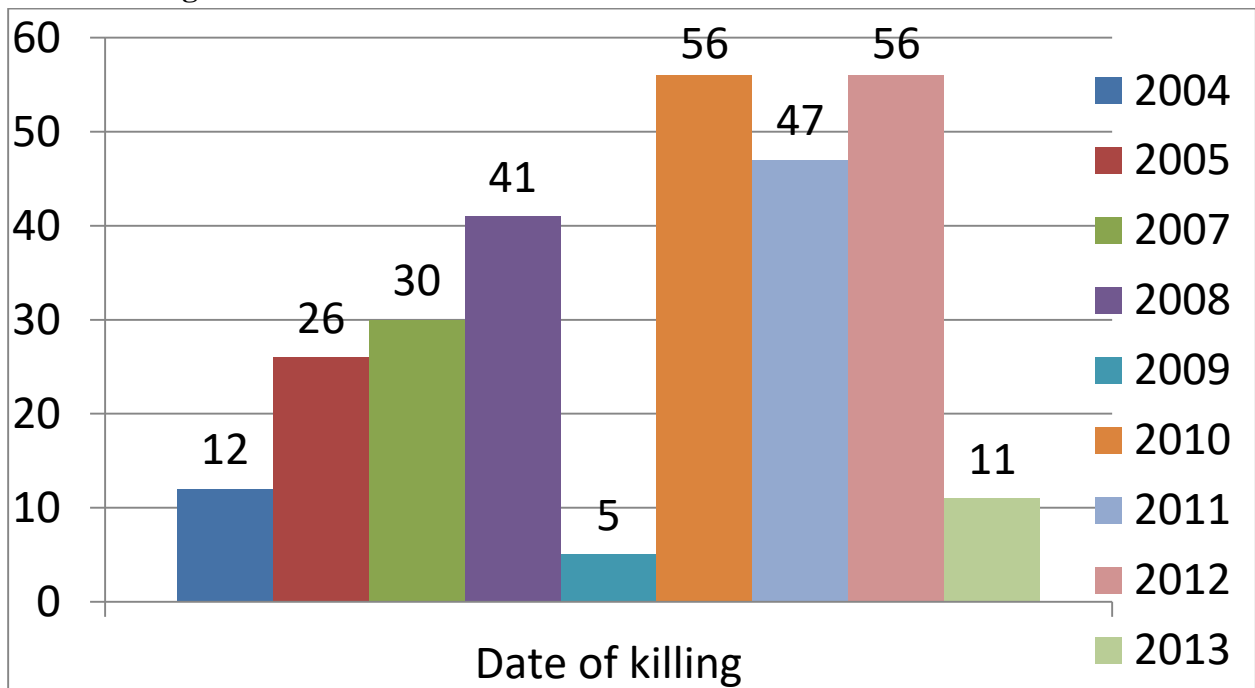
The way they are killed was one of the most important questions asked to the respondents and the data reveals that 89% of them were killed through gun shooting (90% of this group were collected together and shouted in front of their family members). 12 people of them were killed inhumanly and slaughtered like animals. Some 8 individuals of them were hanged with rope and other four and three people were killed with stone beating and knife respectively. This show how cruel was killed innocent civilians in front of their families and relatives.

### Who killed?



The whole survey covered people were killed by government forces composing two armed groups (Military and Liyu police). Majority of the people 63.5% were killed by the Liyu Police and the remaining 26.5% were massacred by the Ethiopian national defense forces ENDF. This indicates the establishment of the counter insurgency (Liyu Police) increased the civilian casualties mainly killing of farmers and pastoralists.

#### Date of killing

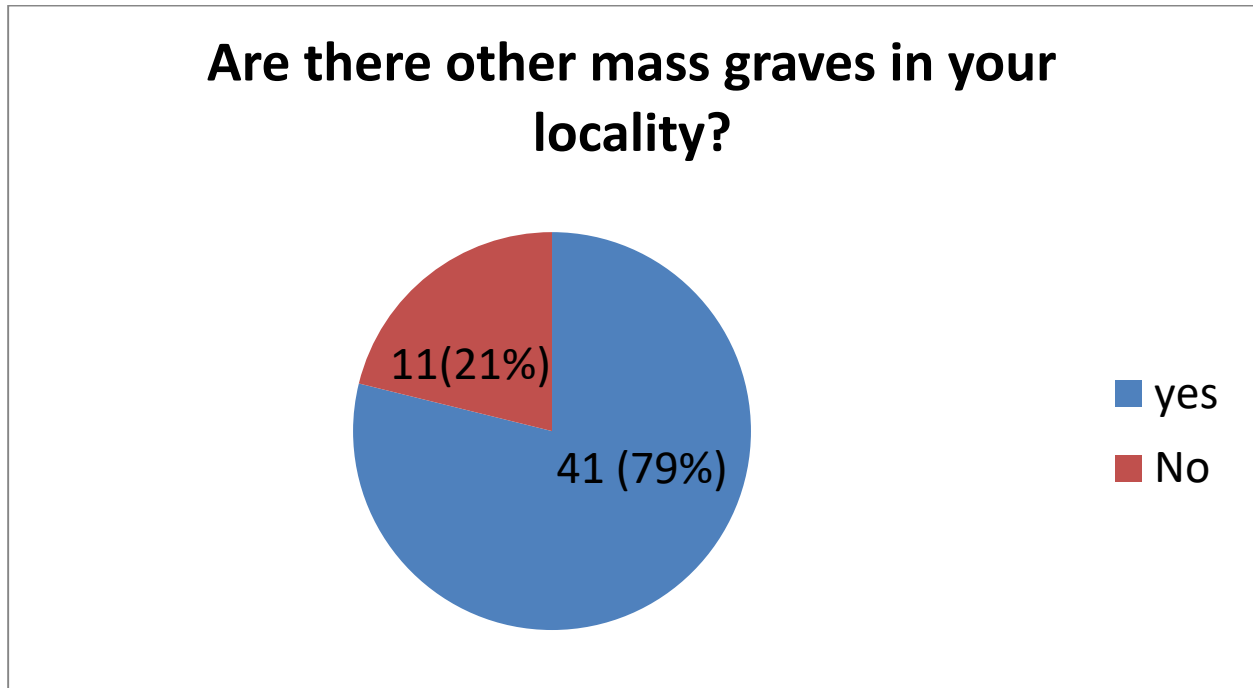


The findings show that all the survey covered people were killed in one decade starting from 2004 to 2013 and the number increased after the Obole incident where ONLF attacked and

destroyed gas and oil exploration site in 2007 and the Ethiopian government started mass operation against insurgents.

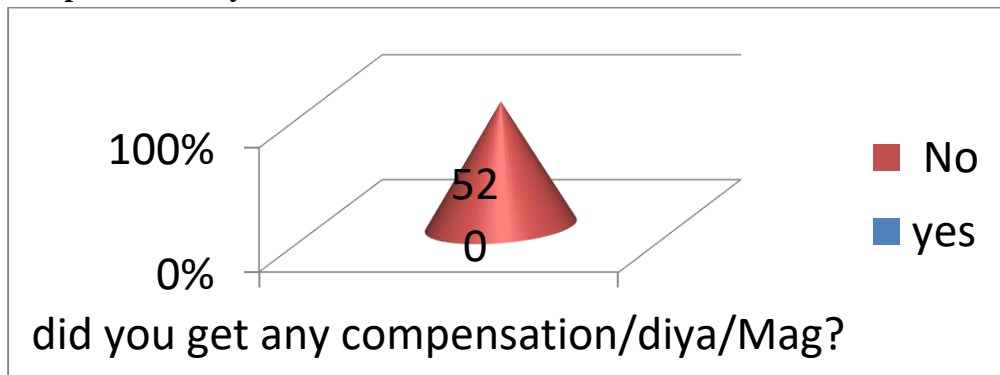
2010 and 2012 were the peak years and 56 people were killed each followed by 2011, 2008 and 2007 respectively. More than half were killed in three consecutive years 2010, 2011 and 2012.

### Other mass graves in the locality



The respondents were also asked whether there are other mass graves in their locality or near to them. 79% of them responded there are other mass graves and 21% told the visited one is the only mass grave in their locality. Some of the mass graves mentioned by the respondents and not covered in the survey include; Buuba, Sanmadheedle, Garsa, Suubada, Aboosa, Kuus cowl, dhogso, duuri, Kuus cowl, Dhogsa, Gariya, Xerro jaarso, tagaabeeyo, afwayne, Gabrodheer, Waji xun, Garbo-dheer, Tuulo guban , Xero bilcil, Qudhac buulo, Taaloole, Qotomalay , farmadoow, Dusmo, buka dhaba, Gunagado

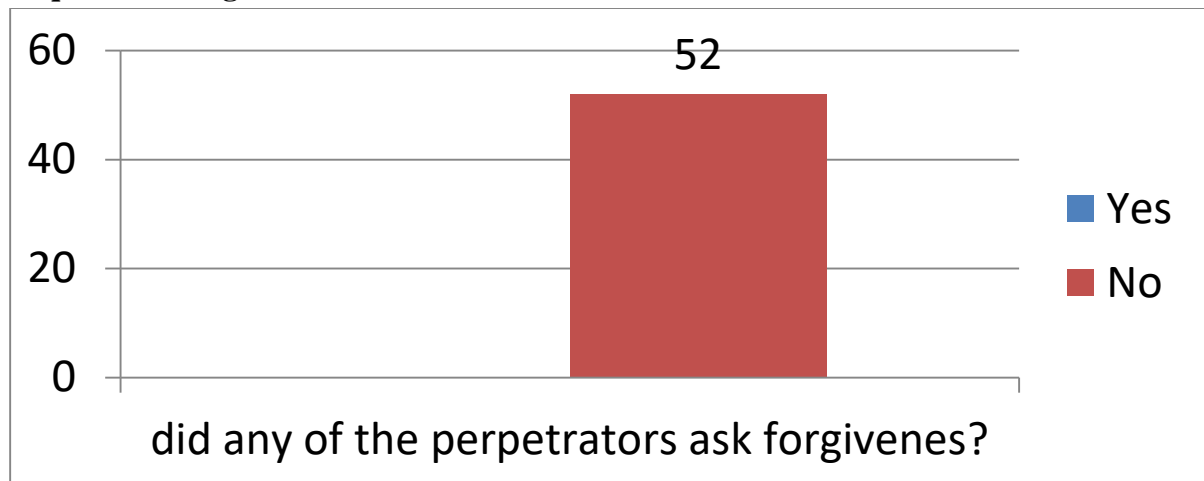
### Compensation/ Diya



The survey findings show that all 100% families and relatives of the killed reported they never got Diya/compensation from the government or other bodies. They lost their loved ones and still

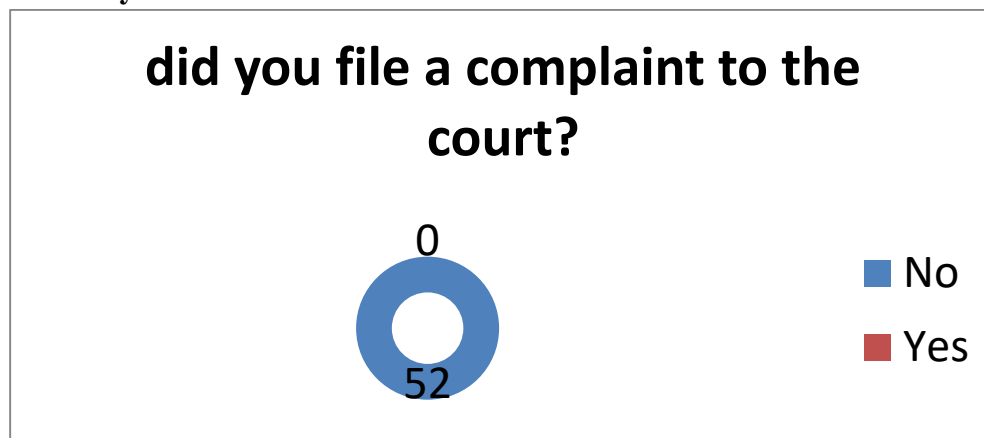
waiting compensation and justice. This shows the political change that took place in 2018 didn't address the issue of victims and the justice they deserved delayed.

### Request for Forgiveness



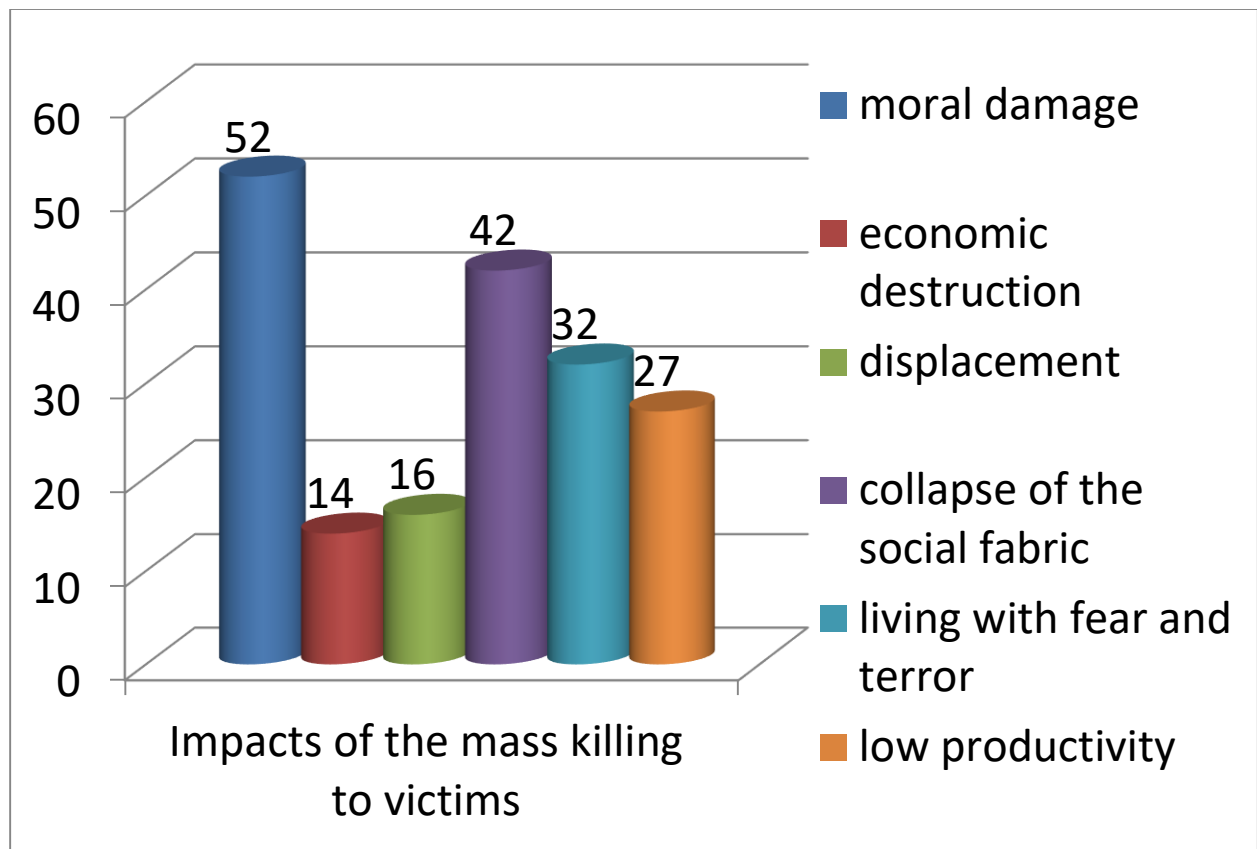
The other worrisome finding of the survey is that none of the perpetrators asked forgiveness to the victim households. Most of the high ranking military and Liyu police official ordering killing of the people are known and still working in the government structures. There are few individuals among the perpetrators who fled the country during the political change in 2018. 100% of the respondents confirmed that none of the killers asked forgiveness. Also the regional government didn't give much attention to the issue of victims and perpetrators reconciliations and trauma healing.

### Judiciary services



Victim families and relatives were asked whether they filed their case to the court in order to get the justice they deserve and all of them (100%) reported that they didn't file their complaints to the court. This is mainly due to their low confidence in the judiciary system. The new administration was expected much in encouraging victim's search of justice and trauma healing process. However, this didn't happen so far and it is necessary for the wellbeing and social cohesion of region and Ethiopia at large.

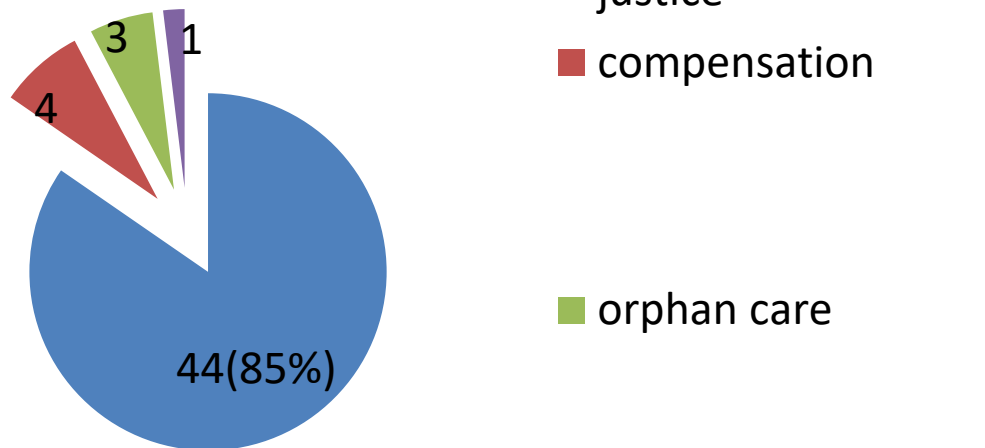
### Impacts of the mass killing



The prolonged conflict lagged behind this region’s economic and social development in general and the killing of the civilians during had specific negative impacts on the families and community at large. Major negative impacts of these massacres include; moral damage, social breakdown, living with fear and terror and low productivity among others. All the respondents reported that they are morally damaged and traumatized due to the killing of their family members. 80% of them revealed the killing resulted collapse in their social fabric and weakened the social harmony in their locality. 61% of the victims told they are living with fear and terror since the killing of their family members. More than 50% of them indicated their productivity decreased as a result of these massacres. The other main negative impacts reported include displacement and economic destruction.

### **Expectations and demands of the victim families**

## What are your Expectations and demand?



Expectations of the victims and families are important and worthy noting to all the concerned stakeholders including the government international rights organizations. The report reveals that 85% of the victims demand fair judiciary service for their loved ones and perpetrators brought to justice. Despite being desperate and low confidence to the current judiciary system, they still demand justice for their family members who were killed for no reasons. Only 7.5% of the respondents requested compensation and other 5.5% told orphan care and provision of livelihood to the children left by the people killed. And there is one person who told they just want to live peace from now on. Therefore, fair judiciary service is the highest priority of the victim families.