

Statement submitted 136th session Human Rights Committee

(10 Oct 2022 - 04 Nov 2022) on Ethiopia

Incidents targeting the Amhara community in 2022

La Coordination des Association et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (France) and Human Rights Without Frontiers (Belgium) are deeply concerned by a series of incidents targeting the Amhara community in Ethiopia in 2022.

ATTACK IN MINJAR SHENKORA: WHO WERE THE AGGRESSORS? (MARCH 2022)

On Tuesday March 29, 2022, armed groups in government vehicles attacked Minjar Shenkora, North Shewa, in the Amhara Region.

The attackers entered the area using three government-owned vehicles. A member of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) was killed by these armed groups and his colleague was severely wounded. In addition, they fired at civilians, including children. Local farmers were also targeted during the shooting.

The casualty and damage done by the attackers could be kept at minimum because very quickly the local armed civilians could be mobilized and the surroundings could be protected.

After the ENDF had left the area, Oromia special forces roamed around the area on several occasions, creating a lot of tensions.

In the report issued by the Oromia regional government, the armed groups are said to be ENDF forces and militia, although the identification card and the clothing the attackers were wearing clearly indicate that they are from Oromia special forces.

WERABE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS UNDER ATTACK (MARCH - APRIL 2022)

In the second week of March, several mass arrests were conducted in Merkato Kebele 32 forcing large numbers of Amhara youth to flee the area in search of a safe place. Young people were protesting against the government, waving the Ethiopian flag without the star during the Adwa Victory celebration. These young Amharas and others arrested in various parts of Addis Abeba were all detained near a place called Aba Samuel on the outskirts of the capital city.

On April 5, Werabe University students protested to denounce the religiously motivated attack on Christian students.

On April 28, Christian students were attacked and murdered by religious extremists in Werabe, Silte zone. Over 30 Amhara students were severely injured and some of them were in life threatening condition. Three others lost their life on the spot in the attack.

Futhermore, Amhara farmers who had gathered to work in Attaye, Yifrata and Gidim Molale of North Shewa at mid-April were shot at and harassed by OLF militants and Oromia Prosperity Party. According to local sources, OLF aggressors started burning houses of Amhara people in a small village called Negesso. Their attacks extended to other towns of Shewa that were not under the protection of regional or federal forces. Civilians were left to defend themselves without any proper armament.

THE CASE OF JOURNALIST GOBEZE SISAY FROM *VOICE OF AMHARA* (MAY 2022)

On May 1, 2022, at about 10am, a group of eight armed men in plainclothes stormed Gobeze's residence in the Ayar Babur Sefer neighbourhood of Addis Abeba, the capital. They searched his house without a court warrant. They confiscated his laptop and his phone.

Some of the men were obviously members of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF). One of them wore an ENDF badge and another mentioned that they were taking him to Tor Hayloch, where the ENDF has a facility. The men held Gobeze for more than a week, blindfolded him and repeatedly questioned him about his critical reporting and affiliations with opposition political groups.

Gobeze was not brought to court or formally charged during his detention. Under the Ethiopian constitutionⁱ, police must release suspects within 48 hours of their detention or charge them with a crime. This provision of the constitution was violated in his case.

Gobeze is the editor and founder of the privately owned YouTube-based broadcaster Voice of Amhara.

On Voice of Amhara, Gobeze recently covered the killingⁱⁱ of ethnic Amharas by rebel groups and the challengesⁱⁱⁱ faced by those displaced by Ethiopia's civil war. According to Gobeze, he previously worked as a news presenter with the privately owned Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) broadcaster, and as a reporter and documentarian for Yegna TV^{iv}, a privately owned YouTube channel.

Gobeze is also the president of the Raya Development and Peace Association, a local civic organization, and is engaged in a civil lawsuit against ESAT for wrongful termination.

On the evening of May 9, the men warned Gobeze to stop his critical reporting or they would detain him again. They then released him near his home.

Authorities at the Addis Ababa Police Commission and the City Peace and Security Administration Bureau denied knowledge of his detention, according to reports^v.

DISCRIMINATORY ACCESS TO COLLEGE IN 2022

After much of the infrastructure in the Amhara Region was destroyed by the ongoing war, trauma-stricken Amhara students have been required to sit for the national exam. The

Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination (EHEEE) was suspected of deliberately sabotaging test scores.

Because of the war, hundreds of thousands of Amharas fled from their homes and into refugee camps. During the peak of the war, in Dessie and Hayq towns of South Wollo Zone, schools closed for two months and only resumed in January 2022.

Over one thousand school facilities across Amhara towns were completely destroyed.

High school seniors living in war zones throughout the Amhara Region were required to take the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination (EHEEE) upon their return to school in January.

The EHEEE exam is critical in identifying students' readiness for college. A high or low mark determines life opportunities and earning potential. The maximum possible exam score is 700, which is the total scores of seven subjects each with a total score of 100 points. The average score for Amharas this year was significantly below that of students in other regions not affected by the civil war.

Out of the 108,683 Amharas student exams graded, 88,698 have failed with scores of less than 351 in Natural Science and 264 in Social Science. In North Gondar and North Wollo regions, where the war between TPLF rebels and Abiy Ahmed's government took a turn for the worst, 13,392 students' scores were released and only 2,741 scores were passing.

Statistics of tests taken from 2016 to 2018 show the Amhara Region was the top performer compared to other regions in Ethiopia. On average, 67% of the students passed the exam in the Amhara region during that period.

Amanuel Tsehay, a senior student from Anabse Sar Meder, East Gojjam, has always been a top testing student throughout his academic career. He took the EHEEE exam this year and received a score of 162. This is a failing score which inhibits him from getting into college. His score was re-evaluated and he ended up with a score of 643, one of the top scores in the country. Amanuel said in an interview that he filed a complaint online but was told his test score was accurate. His relatives in Addis Ababa appealed in person for his exam to be regraded and he was.

There are many Amhara students without the financial means or the political connections needed to appeal their test scores in person.

It should be taken into consideration that Amhara students took the national exam in a devastating and war-torn environment. There was no consideration of their mental and physical wellbeing when deciding the college entry cut-off score (as there have been for students in other regions of Ethiopia). In addition to all of this, their grades were maliciously distorted and reduced as some revised decisions were subsequently taken in appeal procedures.

Recommendations of the concerned students and their families:

- for the Minister of Education and the National Educational Assessment and Examination Agency to regrade the exams of all students in the Amhara region due to the war conditions;
- for the Ethiopian government to investigate the academic inequalities that war children in the Amhara region are currently facing;
- for the government to reconsider the college entry cut-off score for students in the immediately affected areas of war, which encompass Wollo, Shewa, and parts of Gondar.

ARRESTS OF AMHARA JOURNALISTS TEMESGEN DESALEGN AND YAYESEW SHIMELIS (MAY 2022)

On 26 May 2022, around 11 a.m., police officers detained **Temesgen Desalegn**, chief editor of privately owned *Feteh* Amharic magazine, from his office in Addis Ababa, according to Ethiopia Insider^{vi}, and his lawyer Henok Aklilu.

Also on May 26, at around 1:00 p.m., plainclothes police officers arrested **Yayesew Shimelis**, administrator of the YouTube news channel Ethio Forum^{vii}, from his home in Addis Ababa.

Both journalists were brought before the Federal First Instance Court, Arada Branch, which granted police an extension of the journalists' custody pending investigation into allegations that they committed crimes against the state.

Police accused Temesgen of inciting violence and public disturbance through alleged unspecified interviews published on YouTube and accused him of working to create discord between the public and the military, according to his lawyer. He told the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) that the accusations were unfounded given that Temesgen had not appeared in a YouTube interview in at least four years.^{viii}

Yayesew was accused of instigating the public to rebel against the government and instigating people of different religious groups against each other, according to one of two people familiar with his case who spoke to CPJ^{ix} anonymously, citing security concerns. This person said that police alleged that the offenses were committed via interviews that Yayesew published on Ethio Forum and in commentaries he gave in interviews with other outlets, but did not provide specific details.

The media outlets of Temesgen and Yayesew are known for their critical journalism^x of Ethiopia's government. They were arrested amid a broader crackdown as authorities carry out what they've termed as a "law enforcement operation" in the Amhara regional state. The operation also included the arrest of an ally-turned-critic of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Brigadier General Tefera Mamo^{xi}, who was the subject of an exclusive interview^{xii} with *Feteh* earlier this year.

Following Temesgen and Yayesews' arrests, police searched the journalists' homes. In Temesgen's home they confiscated copies of *Feteh* magazine, five hard drives, a camera, a

phone, and a flash disk, according to Tariku's Facebook post and Henok. Police confiscated a book and a flash drive from Yayesew's home, according to one of the two people familiar with his case.

In an interview with BBC Amharic a few days before his arrest, Temesgen said that "security sources" had warned him about his impending arrest, according to a report^{xiii} by the outlet. When asked if there was anything that might lead to his arrest, Temesgen accused the Ethiopian authorities of "turning into a totalitarian dictatorship," saying that they would "suppress the media that could expose [them]."

On Wednesday 25 May, a day before his most recent arrest, Yayesew was convicted of publishing false news in connection with a 2020 case and was sentenced to three months of community service, according to one of the two people familiar with his case.

Both Temesgen and Yayesews have already been previously imprisoned^{xiv} by Ethiopian authorities, as CPJ has documented.

During his detention, Temesgen endured hearing problems from physical abuse. He was beaten up by prison guards when he tried to get close to his brother to be able to hear him during a family visit at the infamous compound of Maekelawi prison.

MASS MASSACRE OF AMHARAS IN WEST WOLLEGA ZONE, OROMIA REGION (JUNE 2022)

CAP/ Liberté de Conscience Submission to the 50th Human Rights Council Session

On Saturday 18 June, ethnic cleansing of Amharas took place in the war-torn West Wollega zone of Oromia Region, according to witnesses who accused the regional forces & rebel group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). In an official statement, the Oromia Regional Government also blamed the OLF-Shene for one of the deadliest attacks in recent memory in the country.

According to an article published by The Guardian^{xv} on 20 June, 260 to 320 people were horrifically massacred.

According to an AFP press release^{xvi} dated 22 June and published by the African News Agency, the death count surpasses 1500.

The Amhara people, the second-largest ethnic group among Ethiopia's more than 110 million population, have been frequently targeted in regions like Oromia.

"I have counted 230 bodies. I am afraid this is the deadliest attack against civilians we have seen in our lifetime," Abdul-Seid Tahir, a resident of Gimbi county, told The Associated Press after barely escaping the attack. "We are burying them in mass graves, and we are still collecting bodies. Federal army units have now arrived, but we fear that the attacks could continue if they leave."

Another witness, who gave only his first name, Shambel, over fears for his safety, said the local Amhara community is now desperately seeking to be relocated somewhere else "before another round of mass killings happen." He said ethnic Amharas that settled in the area about

35 years ago in resettlement programs after the 1984 famine are now being “killed like chickens.”

A survivor also declared: "I found myself in a pile of corpses. I looked up and saw a girl, approximately 6 years old, surrounded by six gunmen. She was begging the killers to save her life but in vain. Although I was there, they did not notice me because they thought I was one of the corpses. They were talking to the girl in Amharic and laughing while she was dying.

“My entire family is killed. No one was spared,” witness Abdu Hassen, who lives nearby, also told DPA news agency by phone.

“I am hearing some 300 bodies are recovered so far. But collecting the bodies hasn’t started in two villages so it could be much higher.”

As expected, an OLA spokesman denied the allegations.

UN Human Rights Office for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet^{xvii} spoke to witnesses who reported that at around 9am local time on 18 June a group of armed individuals descended on the village of Tole, with a predominantly Amhara population, and reportedly began shooting randomly, leaving hundreds dead – most of them women and children – and forcing at least 2,000 others to flee from their homes. The armed individuals also reportedly burned down several houses during the four-hour assault. An unspecified number of people are also reported to have been abducted during the attack and their whereabouts remain unknown.

Bachelet called on the Ethiopian authorities “to ensure that investigations are promptly launched into the attack and to ensure that victims and their families have a right to truth, justice and reparations, including by holding those responsible to account.”

Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa, is experiencing widespread ethnic tensions in several regions, most of them over historical grievances and political tensions.

The government-appointed Ethiopian Human Rights Commission called on the federal government find a “lasting solution” to the killing of civilians and protect them from such attacks.

CAP/ Liberté de Conscience Submission to the 51st Human Rights Council Session

Testimony of a survivor, Mohammed Yusuf

A survivor of the 18 June mass massacre, Mohammed Yusuf (64), has shared his testimony with the BBC broadcasting in Amharic language. Mohammed Yusuf, who had been living there for 32 years, buried 61 people, including 22 of his own family, after the massacre.

In 1990, Mohammed Yusuf, his wife and their children moved to Gimbi where they were given land to till and also engaged in farming.

On 18 June, Gimbi was invaded by armed men. Assuming that they would not kill women and children, Mohammed Yusuf went into hiding in a maze farm while his children and grandchildren stayed at home behind closed door.

Mohammed Yusuf said that he went back home after the shooting which lasted more than half a day but did not find anybody. While searching for family members, he met his wife who was heading home. She was wounded and bleeding. She told him their children had been

taken away from their village and killed near a mosque in Chekorsa Selsaw where their bodies were piled upon each other:

his eldest daughter Semira Mohammed along with her five children
his daughter Aminat Mohammed along with her four children
his daughter Mereyma Mohammed with her two children
his daughter Amet Mohammed
Fatima Mohammed with her five children
Saada Mohammed, another family member

In total, 22 members of his family were killed, including at the hospitals of Nekemt and Gimbi where some of them were treated.

The youngest victim of this massacre was the daughter of his sister who was just a four-day old baby but there were also other children aged two years and a half, seven years old and ten years.

The house, store and property of Mohammed Yusuf were set on fire and largely destroyed by the attackers. The rest of his family now lives in the part of their house that has not been destroyed by the fire attack.

On the day before the attack, security forces belonging to the Oromo Regional government administering the Oromo region were withdrawn from the area and the local Amhara population was left without any protection.

About the perpetrators

Eye-witnesses, survivors of the massacre and the Ethiopian government whom the BBC talked to blamed the OLA (Oromo Liberation Army)^{xviii} or the OLF-Shene (Oromo Liberation Front) as being responsible. The OLA denied that their troops were present and put the blame on the Ethiopian government. The government of the Oromia Region was also accused of not protecting the Amharas.

According to eyewitnesses, the large-scale massacre was primarily perpetrated by thousands of OLA militants who attacked the Amharas in 10 villages in Tole Kebele (ward) of Gimbi Woreda (district) with the collaboration from local ethnic Oromo residents.

According to one witness the heavily armed OLA militias and local Oromo residents flooded all ten villages in a few minutes. In a well-planned strategy, they split up into groups to invade each village. The local Oromo residents guided them in their operation, showed them hiding points, looted properties such as shops and farm animals. The local Oromo perpetrators also finished off victims with machetes who appeared to survive gunshot wounds. The assailants did not spare anyone from 15-day-old infant Nuredin Mohammed from Silsaw village to 100-year old Aba Hajji Hussein from Chekorsa village. Multiple sources have heard OLA militia calling for indiscriminate killing of Amharas.

For instance, one source who saved himself by climbing and sitting in a tree, heard the militias saying to each other “Do not spare anyone. Kill whosoever saw you and you saw” in the Oromo language.

The assailants possessed light and heavy machine guns, rocket launchers and automatic rifles. Some wore old ENDF [Ethiopian National Defense Force] uniforms, others the current

uniform of the Oromia Special Police (Oromo Special Forces). Most had military shoes and some had police shoes.

About the victims

According to the Ethiopian government, the number of those killed was only estimated at 338 whereas some Amhara groups put the number of those massacred so far as being close to 600 individuals. Another local source indicated that over 1500 Amharas were buried in the [Gimbi](#) county of the Oromia Region and a witness told Ethiopia 360 media outlet that the government took away a number of corpses which were not included in any statistics. Also unaccounted are the missing people whose number and fate is unknown.

Many of the victims came from vulnerable populations, including women, children and elderly people. The oldest victim was in fact over 100-year old while the youngest known victim was a 15-day old infant.

The targets of the massacre were only ethnic Amharas. The massacre in most villages lasted 7 hours from morning to the mid-afternoon while some villages such as Begene and Karakore saw extended hours of mass killing that lasted until early evening.

At least 13 people were killed by being burned alive. In at least two cases, pregnant women had their wombs cut open with a knife at which point, the assailants cut out the fetuses which they would chop into pieces with the victim watching and finally, slitting her throat.

There were also several cases of mass executions. In one case, over 55 people including 53 women and children were executed in a forest located in Chefie village. In a similar case, 14 women and children were shot to death in a vacant home located in Silsaw village. There was also a mass execution of 48 people (mostly women and children) who were killed all at once on the property of a site of worship known as Jafar Mosque located in Silsaw village. In many cases, entire families were killed at once.

The massacre which took place in the villages of Tole Kebele resulted in 554 confirmed deaths. The number of deceased victims per village are listed below:

1. Silsaw	164
2. Chekorsa	106
3. Begene	96
4. Assosa Sefer	26
5. Gutin Sefer	40
6. Karakore	36
7. Sene	51
8. Hayaw	19
9. Oromo Shewa	14
10. Tole	5

General Recommendations

Considering that Amharas are not only victims of massacres in regions where they are in the minority but also in their own region because of the war between the Ethiopian Defence National Forces and Tigrayan forces,

CAP/ Conscience et Liberté, along with *Human Rights Without Frontiers* recommend to

the U.N. to set up an inquiry commission to investigate the aforementioned massacres of Amharas all over the country, identify the perpetrators and urge the Ethiopian authorities to prosecute them;

the Ethiopian federal government

- to carry out, without delay, its own investigation about the aforementioned massacres of Amharas all over the country, identify the perpetrators and prosecute them;
- to abide by international standards concerning freedom of the press and the media, and immediately release the arrested Amhara journalists.
- to consider the war conditions that have disturbed the school education of young people when assessing their level of knowledge at the exams meant to give them, or not, to the university and high schools.
- to include representatives of the Amharas and other ethnic groups who have been victims of the war between the Ethiopian federal government and Tigray.

<https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/et/et007en.pdf>

ii https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_z81MjO61w&feature=youtu.be

iii <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJhGITA67QI>

iv https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqu_i6CenWs&feature=youtu.be

v <https://bit.ly/3KZkqW6>

vi <https://ethiopiainsider.com/2022/6939/>

vii <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXUFyN9Ys5tiIHgJFQKRJvA>

viii <https://cpj.org/2022/05/journalists-yayesew-shimelis-and-temesgen-desalegn-detained-in-ethiopia/>

ix <https://cpj.org/2022/05/journalists-yayesew-shimelis-and-temesgen-desalegn-detained-in-ethiopia/>

x <https://fetehmagazine.com/ጎረቤቶች/የዘቀዘቀዘው-የጠቅላይ-ሚኒስትሩ-ጀምበር/>

xi <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/wife-says-ethiopian-general-arrested-after-criticising-government-2022-05-20/>

xii <https://fetehmagazine.com/ቀደይ-መስመሮች/የጄነራል-ምስጢሮች-ከብ-ጄ-ተፈራ-ማሞ-ጋር-የ/?fbclid=IwAR3Vp0fROZkLQvvTa4cxvSPQ5dsVg9dUUeB0BnhUj1tybJVBrvmF2kzX5ig>

xiii <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/news-61591369>

xiv <https://cpj.org/data/people/temesghen-desalegn/>

xv <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/20/as-many-as-320-dead-in-ethiopia-gun-attack-witnesses-suggest>

xvi <https://www.africannewsagency.com/news/ethiopia-wollega-massacre-death-count-surpasses-1-500-efa84d6f-5865-5533-a486-378c75449d1e/>

xvii <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/bachelet-urges-prompt-investigation-killings-western-ethiopia>

xviii The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) is an armed opposition group active in [Ethiopia](#). The OLA consist primarily of former armed members of the pre-peace deal OLF who chose to continue the armed struggle against the government. The Ethiopian government now considers the OLF to be a legal political party but the OLA to be a terrorist group, ^[2] though the OLA is accused of continuing to act as the armed wing of the OLF. The Ethiopian government refuses to call the OLA by its chosen name, instead referring to it as Shene or OLF-Shene.