**A Report on the List of Issues in Ethiopia**

**Introduction**

Partners For Transparency closely follows the human rights developments in Ethiopia, and it is deeply concerned about the negative developments that the country is going through, especially with regard to Article 21 on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and Article 9 on individual’s right to freedom of thought, belief and religion.

In this regard, the report focuses on a number of issues that must be brought to the attention of the Human Rights Committee during the review of the State party report.

**First - The Right to Protest: the continued crackdown on opposition demonstrations**

Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides for freedom of peaceful assembly; however, most gatherings were disrupted violently, resulting in a large share of civilian casualties. The Foundation, therefore, would like to indicate such cases:

Between November 2015 until late July 2016, about half a million Ethiopian protesters have reportedly flooded the streets of Gonder in the Amhara region of northern Ethiopia, and nearly 125 Oromo people were killed and hundreds others were injured. Not so long after the country’s largest protests of 2015, protests erupted again calling for freedom and justice, leading to the death of 500 Ethiopian citizens, in wake of an annual, widely-celebrated cultural festival in the Oromiya region of Ethiopia – which is known as Irreecha. The Ethiopian government continues to deny categorically its involvement in this event.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The situation has not changed much after the election of the current Prime Minister of the State party, as violence is still prevalent. In June 2018, a few months after Abiy Ahmed came to power, a pro-PM rally was staged in Ethiopia’s most central and main square- Meskel Square. Amid thousands of people, Mr. Abiy was targeted in an attack that claimed the lives of two people and left 44 others injured.[[2]](#footnote-2) This attack was regarded by Abiy Ahmed as a remainder of the extent of the opposition his reforms have attracted in some quarters. From this moment on, the Ethiopian government’s response to protests began to change. At first, it responded with denunciation, condemnation and dire warnings, but later, it became more violent.

On 17 September 2018, the Ethiopian government only denounced the ethnic violence that has claimed 58 lives and arrested dozens of people on the outskirts of the capital. The demonstrators had taken to the streets of the Ethiopian capital to protest government inaction over ethnically motivated clashes that also wounded and displaced dozens of people. It was the latest incident in a spate of ethnic unrest that has killed hundreds of people and forced 1.5 million more to flee their homes in the past year.[[3]](#footnote-3)

On 24 September 2018, at least 8 people were killed by security forces in Gambella town, western Ethiopia, during a peaceful demonstration. Several more were beaten and mass arrests were conducted.[[4]](#footnote-4)

On October 21, 2018, during a public demonstration in Alamata town, Northern Ethiopia, Tigray Region on October 21, 2018, thousands were demanding the identity question of the Raya people to be recognized as Amhara, local security forces shot and killed 9 individuals. Additionally, at least 50 people were injured with gunshot and after beaten by security forces who intervened to disperse the protestors. [[5]](#footnote-5)

On 26 and 27 October 2018, the Public demonstrations held in Semera town of the Afar Regional State, Northeastern of Ethiopia, were met with forceful dispersal by the regional police force, who beat, and injured many demonstrators. 50 were also arrested. They were protesting against the local administration and demanding democratic reform and respect for human rights.[[6]](#footnote-6)

On 22 July 2019, at least 25 people have died in clashes between Ethiopian security forces and activists in southern Ethiopia, during the protests across the Sidama region. Activists from the Sidama ethnic group were set to hold a referendum on establishing their own federal state.[[7]](#footnote-7) In July 2018, Sidama representatives submitted their request for a referendum on having their own officially recognized region. As part of the constitution, the Ethiopian government must hold a referendum within a year of a request from any ethnic group which wishes to form a separate entity.[[8]](#footnote-8) As the one-year deadline approached, it became clear that the vote would not be organized on time, leading to escalating tensions and violence that resulted in 25 casualties. The request was ultimately deferred to 13, 2019, then rescheduled to November 20, 2019.

Eventually, after many disputes and casualties, the referendum took place and the preliminary results demonstrated that 98% of voters were in support of statehood.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Add to the list the protests launched in October 2019, which were suppressed by Addis Ababa police forces, after the insurance coverage was cancelled for the prominent political opposition, Jawar Muhammad, pushing the death toll up to 86.[[10]](#footnote-10)

On February 17, 2020, the police in Ethiopia launched an attack on opposition party supporters in the Oromia Region, killing one person and arresting and injuring scores more. The police fired live bullets and tear gas, killing an Oromia Liberation Front OLF supporter who was a clothes vendor. firing live bullets and tear gas, killing an Oromo Liberation Front supporter who was a clothes seller. Later that day, police arrested around 30 guests at a hotel launch party in Burayu and drove them to a sports stadium where they were beaten and humiliated for hours.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In July 2020, Ethiopia was rocked by violent protests, after the killing of the folk singer Hashalu Hondisa, in which at least 166 people were killed, 167 people were seriously injured, and 1084 people were arrested.[[12]](#footnote-12)

After the Wolaita people demanded their right to establish a state of their own separated from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Regional State (SNNPRS), the security forces arbitrarily arrested them at the beginning of August 2020, forcing people to go out in demonstrations demanding their release. This led to the death, injury, and arbitrary arrest of dozens, including Dagato Cumbi, Wolaita district director, and many of them belong to the opposition party Wolaita National Movement.[[13]](#footnote-13) The Foundation expresses its concern about the government’s violent response and these arrests of those seeking to establish a new independent region for their ethnic group (Wolaita), which is permitted by the federal constitution of Ethiopia after a referendum on the new decentralized conditions.

It is expected that this violent approach will continue in light of the apparent absence of accountability and responsibility.

**Second - Arbitrary arrests: an unusual practice in light of the reforms made**

Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates the right to liberty and personal security. However, previous Ethiopian governments have consistently used repression and sometimes violence, including arbitrary arrests, to counter any social movement. In late November 2015, weeks after the protests that have spread across the Oromia region, opposing the government’s so-called "Addis Ababa Master Plan", security forces arbitrarily arrested thousands of people, as well as university students. [[14]](#footnote-14) Several detainees were arrested and tortured in the notorious Maekelawi detention center, which has a chilling effect on Ethiopian opposition. [[15]](#footnote-15)

While the Ethiopian authorities have in recent months made a commendable attempt to empty the country’s prisons of arbitrary detainees, in September 2018, during a press conference, the police commissioner claimed that the security forces carried out a widespread campaign of arrests, in response to the increasing crime rates in the city, which resulted in arresting around 3,000 people. The majority of people were arrested for perceived offences which are not recognized criminal offences under international law, such as smoking shisha[[16]](#footnote-16) or consuming khat.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Another 1,200 youths were arrested for taking part in the 15 September protests on the ethnic violence in Burayu and transported to Tolay military camp in southwestern Ethiopia, where they are being arbitrarily detained at a camp with the pretext of “rehabilitation education”. The rebels have went on a hunger strike protesting poor living conditions and inhumane treatment. It is not known how long the camp is supposed to last.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In late January 2020, at least 75 supporters of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) were arrested over the weekend from various places in different parts of Oromia Regional State, as Ethiopian authorities intensify the crackdown on dissenting political views ahead of the general elections. Arrests took place across the state including in Finchawa town in West Guji Zone of Oromia, and Shambu town in Horo-Guduru Wallaga Zone of Oromia. These sweeping arrests risk undermining the rights to freedom of expression and association ahead of the 2020 elections, which have been postponed for a year due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. Among those arrested was Chaltu Takele, a prominent political activist.[[19]](#footnote-19) Police broke into her parents’ home in Shambu town, Horo-Guduru Wellaga at 5am on 26 January and arrested her. She is detained at the Shambu Police Station.[[20]](#footnote-20)

In late February 2020, Abdi Regassa - a senior member of the opposition political party Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) - disappeared after security officers in Addis Ababa broke into his home and arrested him alongside eight other party members on 29 February. The other eight party members were released later the same day, but Abdi Regassa was not. He may have been subjected to enforced disappearance and is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment, according to his lawyer.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In March 2020, Jawar Mohammed, an influential activist turned politician, accused the Ethiopian government of deploying repressive tactics to frustrate legitimate political activity of opposition parties across Oromia. He added that in addition to detaining organizers in local police station, they are have restarted shipping people to the infamous mass detention centers at military camps. He cited instances of signature collection – a key electoral requirement – had systematically been frustrated by government elements. These all acts of pre-election interferences are documented and reported to the NEBE (National Electoral Board of Ethiopia)[[22]](#footnote-22).

There are already over 2,000 Sidama political prisoners in detention across Sidama and Hadiya regions in Ethiopia. The latest mass arrest in Sidama occurs at the time when prisoners in Ethiopia and many countries are being released to save lives amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The authorities have resorted to harassing Sidama civilians to silence the legitimate grievances of the people arising from procrastination in formalizing Sidama Regional State, as mentioned previously.[[23]](#footnote-23)

All this is culminated by the extrajudicial killing. In late May 2020, Ethiopian security forces in the Oromia region have executed 39 opposition supporters and arrested thousands of others accused of being supporters of the Oromo Liberation Army, the breakaway armed wing of the Oromo Liberation Front, which the government had previously declared a terrorist movement but which has been unbanned by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The Ethiopian army, the prime minister’s office and the Oromiya and the Amhara police did not immediately respond to requests for comment.[[24]](#footnote-24) Having been pressured by human rights organizations, the Public Prosecution Office announced that the report will be opened and investigated.[[25]](#footnote-25)

All of the above puts the reforms introduced by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to the test due to widespread impunity and lack of accountability for these violations.

**Recommendations**

The Foundation suggests a number of recommendations to the Human Rights Committee, as follows:

1. Asking the State party to provide a detailed explanation about the violent response to the demonstrations mentioned in the report, the findings of the internal investigations, and how the State party acted to compensate the victims and their families.
2. Calling on the State party to immediately release the detainees mentioned in the report, especially those in overcrowding prisons, where it is impossible to implement social distancing measures in light of the Covid-19 virus.
3. Calling on the State party to put an end to the ongoing campaign of arbitrary arrests, and stop stifling free expression, which brings to mind the bygone governments.

1. رشا السيد عشري، "الاحتجاجات في إثيوبيا : الأبعاد والسيناريوهات"، قراءات أفريقية، 2017-02-28، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/2Z0q6so> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ارتفاع ضحايا تفجير استهدف تجمع مؤيدي رئيس وزراء إثيوبيا إلى قتيلين وعشرات المصابين"، بي بي سي، 24 يونيو/ حزيران 2018، على الرابط التالي: <https://bbc.in/2LcO3VT> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ethiopia: Investigate police conduct after deaths of five people protesting ethnic clashes”, Amnesty, 17 September 2018, <http://bit.ly/2Q072p9> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. News: Protesters Killed By Security Forces In Southern Tigray Region, Northern Ethiopia”, addis standard / October 22, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2TT1pKJ> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Scores killed across Ethiopia in recent demonstrations”, AHRE, 2ND NOVEMBER 2018, <http://bit.ly/3cMnByR> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ethiopia referendum: Dozens killed in Sidama clashes”, BBC, 22 July 2019, <https://bbc.in/39CWtQM> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ويشكل سكان المنطقة 4% من سكان إثيوبيا البالغ عددهم 105 ملايين نسمة وهم أكبر عدد من السكان بين المجموعات العرقية البالغ عددها 56 مجموعة والتي تشكل ولاية (القوميات والشعوب الجنوبية [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ethiopia Holds Referendum to Determine Statehood for Sidama Zone”, ifes, 15 Jan 2020, <http://bit.ly/33aEi2G> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. بعد ارتفاع ضحايا الاحتجاجات.. إثيوبيا تتوعد "دعاة الفوضى"، عربي 21، 04 نوفمبر 2019، على الرابط التالي: <http://bit.ly/39Buu4b> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ethiopia: Vendor killed, musician injured after police attack opposition supporters in Oromia”, Amnesty International, 17 February 2020, available at: <http://bit.ly/2IwUDoP> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. مقتل 166 على الأقل في تظاهرات عنيفة هزت إثيوبيا"، العربي نت، 05 يوليو 2020، على الرابط التالي: <https://ara.tv/n9423> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. سكاي نيوز عربية، قتلى وعشرات الجرحى في احتجاجات عنيفة في إثيوبيا، 11 أغسطس 2020، متاح على: <https://bit.ly/2XVSCdR> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. المرجع السابق [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ethiopia: Prisoner release must be followed by wider reforms and free expression protections”, Article 19, JANUARY 09, 2018, available at: <https://bit.ly/3e0aucQ> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. ووفقًا لمفوض الشرطة، تم اعتقال أكثر من نصفهم - 1،459 شخصًا - في حانات وأماكن تدخين الشيشة. قُبض على أربعة وتسعين شخصًا لمضغ القات، وهي ورقة مخدرة خفيفة ، واعتُقل 31 آخرون في منازل القمار. وقد تم إطلاق سراح بعض هؤلاء بسبب اعتقالهم لمضغ القات وتدخين الشيشة [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ethiopia: Mass arbitrary arrests and detentions of youth threaten a new era of human rights gains”, Amnesty International, 24 September 2018, available at: <http://bit.ly/38CPBlf> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ethiopia's returnee OLF rebels on hunger strike”, Africa News, 14 March, available at: <http://bit.ly/2TQhpxb> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. قضى شالتو أكثر من ثماني سنوات في السجن بين عامي 2008 و2016 بعد اتهامها بأنها عضو في جبهة تحرير أورومو، التي كانت مدرجة على أنها 'منظمة إرهابية'. قبل أن يشطبها البرلمان الإثيوبي جبهة تحرير أورومو وغيرها من جماعات المعارضة السياسية من حظر الجماعات الإرهابية في عام 2018. كما اعتقلت شالتو واحتجزت لفترة وجيزة في عام 2017، ومرة أخرى في عام 2019 أثناء حملها [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ethiopia: Authorities crack down on opposition supporters with mass arrests”, Amnesty, 27 January 2020, available at: <http://bit.ly/2Q3LUyn> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ethiopia: Police must account for missing Oromo opposition leader”, Amnesty International, 3 March 2020, <http://bit.ly/3cLTUxT> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ethiopian politician slams Abiy's 'regime' over alleged political repression”, Africa News, 5/3/2020, available at: <http://bit.ly/2W0wXko> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. More arrests in Sidama as authorities refuse to hand power to new region”, op.cit [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Amnesty accuses Ethiopia of extrajudicial killings”, Africa News, 30 May 2020, available at: <https://bit.ly/2XJoQrT> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. إثيوبيا تحقق في انتهاك حقوق الإنسان بإقليمي أورومي وأمهرة"، العين الإخبارية، 2 يونيو 2020، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3dKiTS6> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)