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### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## **Written statement\* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

## **REQUESTING THAT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERTS ON ETHIOPIA INVESTIGATE AND CONDEMN THE SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND CRIMES COMMITTED BY THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT AGAINST THE AMHARA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The European Centre for Law and Justice wishes to bring forth the severe human rights violations happening against the Amhara people of Ethiopia. The situation has reached alarming levels and requires immediate reaction.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Amhara people have been subjected to persecution and systematic massacres as early as 1991, when the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led coalition assumed power(1). The motivation for these killings stems from anti-Amhara sentiments and aims to establish homogenous regions as part of the formation of ethnic federalism structures. Various groups, especially the Qeerroo (translating literally to Youth in Oromo language), the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), the TPLF, and the currently leading Prosperity Party, appear to have been perpetrators of these crimes.

The TPLF manifesto(2), Oromo scholars, and political leaders, have fostered the prevailing anti-Amhara sentiment. This sentiment is closely tied to an aversion toward the Orthodox faith, given that the majority of Amharas are Orthodox Christians. Presently, this animosity toward the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is evident in the massacre of Christians, state-sponsored schisms, and the burning of churches.

On August 4, 2023, the government declared a nationwide state of emergency, with the aim of militarily defeating the "Fano" forces—a decentralized militia without a leading figure. Following this declaration, alarming reports emerged of extensive arbitrary detentions and drone attacks targeting Amhara civilians. Human rights organizations have expressed deep concerns over potential human rights catastrophe(3).

The human rights violations faced by the Amhara population range from forced displacement and mass arrests to systematic massacres and ethnic cleansings.

### **VIOLATIONS**

On June 29, 2020, a renowned Oromo singer and political activist was assassinated, leading to massive protests that escalated into a premeditated massacre. In the subsequent weeks, a group identifying as "Queroo" targeted Amhara and Orthodox believers in the Oromia region. Towns including Shashemene, Arsi, Dera, and Zeway witnessed significant destruction, with properties of non-Oromo ethnicities being vandalized and burned. The violence resulted in an estimated 239 casualties. A harrowing account from a survivor details the brutal killing of his nine-month-pregnant wife in front of their children. "They killed her because she is an Orthodox Christian" he recalls, "They said that Christian children should not be born, Amhara children should not be born." The NGO "Minority Rights Group" reported(4) that the attacks were well-prepared and that the rioters had a list of names and went from house to house checking ID cards and conducting massacres accordingly to the list. According to reports from the same NGO, police forces in these areas have been of no help, as they claimed they were not authorized to intervene. Apparently, when victims attempted to defend themselves, the Oromia region's special forces have attacked them. This information points to clear complicity on the part of the government. Although this massacre is far from being the only incident, it is highly representative of the ethno-religious nature of these acts.

On June 18, 2022, the Amhara community in Wollega within the Oromia region of Ethiopia, was brutally slaughtered in the Gimbi massacre. The perpetrator was reportedly the OLA terrorist group. However, the armed force has denied responsibility and claims that government forces were responsible for this killing. The victim count is between 400 and 500 people. According to an investigative report by the Amhara Association of America (AAA), 13 people were burned alive and “in at least two cases, pregnant women had their wombs cut open with a knife”(5). A witness reported hearing the gunmen say: “We are heroes, and no one can escape from us. We will kill you all”(6). The massacre lasted for 8 hours and government forces did not interfere despite the pleas of the people. They claimed they were unable to respond because the roads were closed. They only appeared hours after the attackers left the area.

On July 4, 2022, the OLA terrorist group committed a massacre in the same region, known as Qelem Wollega(7). The victim count is between 150 and 308 people. The modus operandi remained the same, as they targeted and killed members of the Amharas ethnic group.

The alarming frequency of such incidents underscores the vulnerability of the Amhara community in Ethiopia. A distressing series of massacres—ranging from the Burayu massacre in 2018, the Shashemene massacre in 2019, to multiple incidents in 2020 and 2021 including the Mai Kadra, Metekel, Ataye, Chenna, Kombolcha, and Kobo massacres—bear testament to this ongoing crisis.

Other violations include the forced displacement of the Amhara community residing around Addis Ababa. Since January 1, 2023, there have been consistent reports(8) of the government orchestrating discriminatory displacements, targeting primarily non-Oromos, especially Amharas, in the vicinity of the capital. Approximately 3,415 houses were demolished in this context. While the government justifies these actions by labeling the houses as “illegal settlements” needed for the “Sheger City” project, their motives come into question. Dr. Teshome Adugna, the mayor of Sheger City, when questioned about the selective nature of these demolitions, responded that they aimed to avoid displacing the “indigenous” people(9). This effectively creates a system of segregation in which certain citizens are accorded more rights than others.

It was against this backdrop that a state of emergency was declared in Ethiopia. It is less than a month on, but we have already received reports of human rights violations under this state of emergency.

The Amhara community in Ethiopia is facing an escalating wave of mass and arbitrary arrests. In May 2023 alone, the government reportedly detained over 4,500 ethnic Amhara individuals(10). This number surged following the declaration of the state of emergency on August 4, 2023, with claims suggesting that around 14,000 Amhara individuals have since been apprehended. Many of these detainees find themselves in makeshift detention centers, with schools being repurposed for this cause. Mothers were seen sitting on the porch of the Dejazmach Wondirad secondary school in Addis Ababa, where many members of the Amhara ethnic group were detained. Anxiously hoping for the possible release of her son, one witness said: “It’s been eleven days since they took him [...] He hasn’t done anything wrong.”(11)

There are also reports indicating the use of drones against civilians, and of extrajudicial and summary executions. On Sunday, August 13, 2023, a drone attack took place in the central town of Finote Selam in the Amhara region, killing at least 26 civilians and injuring 55 others(12).

## REQUESTS

We respectfully request the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia to conduct a thorough investigation into the alleged grave human rights violations

and offenses purportedly committed by the Ethiopian government against the Amhara community. Should these allegations be substantiated, they may be tantamount to crimes against humanity.

Furthermore, we kindly propose that the Commission recommends a revision of its current mandate to the Human Rights Council, enabling a more comprehensive investigation into these abuses.

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(1) Human Rights Watch, "ETHIOPIA: Human Rights Developments," Human Rights Watch, 1993, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/WR93/Afw-01.htm>

(2) Bamlak Yideg & Dr. Peteti Premanandam, "The 1976 TPLF Manifesto and Political instability in Amhara Region, Ethiopia," RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary, Volume-04, Issue-01, January-2019, [https://zenodo.org/record/2544650/files/300-303\\_RRIJM190401062.pdf?download=1](https://zenodo.org/record/2544650/files/300-303_RRIJM190401062.pdf?download=1)

(3) Amnesty International, "Ethiopian authorities must allow independent investigators, media access to Amhara region," Amnesty International, August 18, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/08/ethiopia-authorities-must-grant-independent-investigators-media-unfettered-access-to-amhara-region-to-probe-violations-under-state-of-emergency/>

(4) Minority Rights Group International, "Recent violence in Ethiopia's Oromia region shows hallmark signs of ethnic cleansing, says MRG," Minority Rights Group, July 22, 2020, <https://minorityrights.org/2020/07/22/ethnic-cleansing-romia/>

(5) Amhara Association of America. (2022). "“It Seems Like The Whole Population Is Killed”: An Interim Report on the June 18th, 2022 Amhara Massacre in the Tole Kebele, Gimbi Woreda, West Wollega Zone of Ethiopia's Oromia Region by Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) militants." <https://www.amharaamerica.org/post/june-18th-2022-amhara-massacre-in-the-tole-kebele-west-wollega-by-olf>

(6) Human Rights Watch. (2022, August 31). "Ethiopia: Civilians in Western Oromia Left Unprotected." <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/31/ethiopia-civilians-western-romia-left-unprotected>

(7) BBC Amharic. (2022, July 5). "ኦሮሚያ ክልል፡ በቁለም ወለጋ ዞን በተፈፀመ ጥቃት ቢያንስ 150 ሰዎች መገደላቸውን የዐይን እማኞች ተናገሩ." <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/cd1k52n7429o>

(8) Amhara Association of America. (2023, May 14). "Report on Home Demolitions and Forced Evictions of Amharas in the Newly Established Sheger City Administration of the Oromia Region: A City that Denies Amhara Existence in their Homeland of Ethiopia." [https://www.amharaamerica.org/\\_files/ugd/e494ca\\_070ed9eaf6ee49ae82164cb626f34da4.pdf](https://www.amharaamerica.org/_files/ugd/e494ca_070ed9eaf6ee49ae82164cb626f34da4.pdf)

(9) EBC. "Etv ብርቱ ወግ በሽገር ከተማ ምስረታ ላይ ከከተማው ከንቲባ ዶ/ር ተሾመ አዱኛ ጋር የተደረገ ቆይታ." YouTube, uploaded on 13 June 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x3wf55mSq8>

(10) AP News. (2022, June 3). "Ethiopia's mass arrests show rift with former Amhara allies." <https://apnews.com/article/politics-kenya-africa-ethiopia-arrests-324b72c41ce1d991db8ff222e8469887>

(11) Ethiopian Reporter / ሪፖርተር ኢትዮጵያ. "በአዲስ አበባ ቤተሰቦቻቸው የታሰሩባቸው ዜጎች ስቃይና እንግልት @ethiopiareporter." YouTube, uploaded on 16 August 2023, [https://youtu.be/zMt498\\_tRLM?t=111](https://youtu.be/zMt498_tRLM?t=111)

(12) Le Monde with AFP. (2023, August 15). "Air strike kills at least 26 in Ethiopia's Amhara." Le Monde.fr. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/08/15/air-strike-kills-at-least-26-in-ethiopia-s-amhara\\_6093248\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/08/15/air-strike-kills-at-least-26-in-ethiopia-s-amhara_6093248_4.html)