



# Ethiopia

*Security situation in Amhara, Oromia  
and Tigray regions and return*



This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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## Executive summary

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The human rights situation in Ethiopia, particularly in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia, has been extensively documented and shows a range of violations and abuses across different regions.

Ethiopian state actors have committed human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests, killings, torture, and sexual violence, particularly in Tigray, Amhara and Oromia. The government extended the State of Emergency (SoE) declared in August 2023 in Amhara and used it nationwide to suppress dissent, with widespread arbitrary detentions and human rights abuses.

Human rights organisations in Ethiopia face significant threats, including detentions and harassment of their members, severely impacting their ability to operate and monitor violations. The government has severely restricted the freedom of expression, with numerous journalists detained and media platforms controlled or censored.

Men and women are affected differently by the conflicts, with men more often killed, and women more often subjected to sexual violence. Female combatants face reintegration challenges; displacement exacerbates vulnerabilities, especially for women.

The Ethiopian government employs multiple surveillance methods, including digital, physical, and financial monitoring, to gather intelligence on citizens. Surveillance has intensified across the country after the implementation of the SoE.

Ethiopia is highly vulnerable to climate change, with recurring floods and droughts exacerbating the already challenging humanitarian situation.

The security situation in Amhara has been volatile since April 2023, marked by armed clashes between Fano militias and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF). The SoE further intensified the conflict, resulting in arbitrary killings, arrests, and increased displacement.

Since the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in November 2022 that ended a two-year conflict in the Tigray region, the security situation in Tigray has improved but remains unstable. Eritrean and Amhara forces have not fully withdrawn, and sporadic violent clashes continue.

The conflict in Oromia involves the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and various armed groups against federal authorities and regional forces. Despite peace talks in 2023, violence has intensified, with frequent attacks on civilians and kidnappings for ransom. The humanitarian situation is dire, with limited access to essential services and severe drought exacerbating the crisis.

Oromia has the highest number of arrests and detentions due to suspicions of affiliations with armed groups. Authorities often deny fair trials for detainees while holding them in informal detention centres. The OLA members and their families face maltreatment, imprisonment and torture. Low levels of evidence are needed for arrests due to the OLA's designation as a

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terrorist organisation. Federal authorities target members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), despite recognising them as a legal political party. High-ranking officials may face arbitrary targeting and detention. Both state and non-state actors engage in attacks on civilians perceived as political opponents, leading to widespread violence and retaliation. Oromos advocating the Oromo cause in the capital are relatively safer unless involved in mobilising for unlawful activities. Perceived affiliations with the OLA can still lead to detention.

Since the CoHA, ethnic profiling and arbitrary detentions of Tigrayans by authorities have significantly decreased. The federal government no longer targets TPLF members, and high-profile officials can travel freely. However, surveillance persists, especially for those traveling to and from Tigray. Those working with the federal government face restrictions and threats from the TPLF, leading to fear and limited movement.

Since the 2018 peace agreement, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) participates in regional politics, and large-scale prosecution of ONLF affiliates has declined. Although officially disbanded, former Liyu Police personnel remain active in other regional roles, with some still occupying government positions. Their exact status and functions remain unclear.

Information on the treatment of failed asylum seekers returning from Europe is scarce, but a large number of Ethiopian migrants have returned from the Middle East. Bole Airport has stable infrastructure for data collection on passengers. The monitoring of arrivals by authorities varies, with those denied asylum abroad not automatically becoming persons of interest. Seeking asylum at the airport is limited and generally suspended except in emergency contexts.

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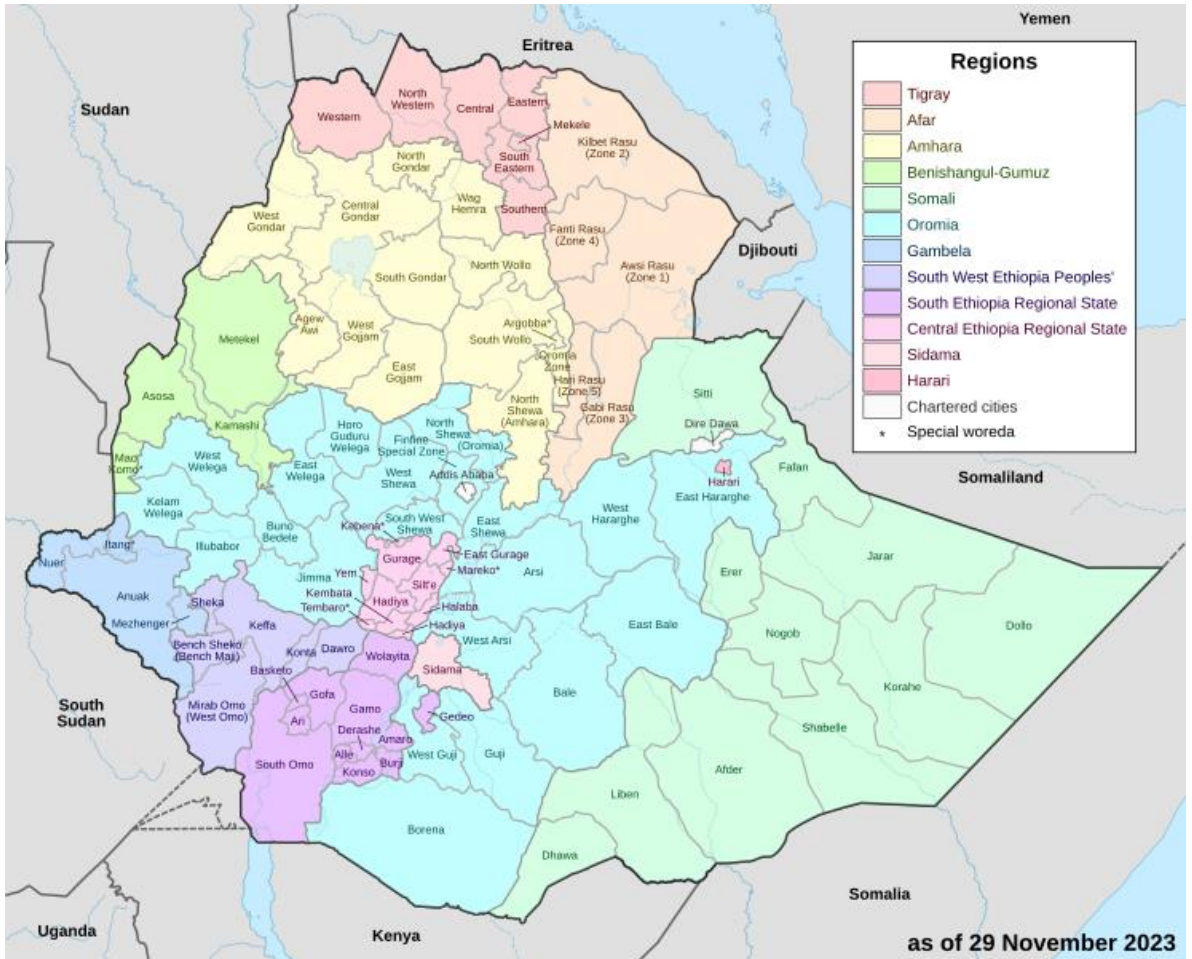
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## Map of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is administratively divided into four levels: Regions, zones, woredas (districts) and kebeles (wards).<sup>1</sup> Below is a map of Ethiopia by regions and zones created by Wikimedia Commons.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> BTI, *Ethiopia Country Report 2024*, 2024, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> Wikimedia Commons, *Map of zones of Ethiopia*, 29 November 2023, [url](#)



## Introduction

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The report at hand covers the evolving security and humanitarian situation in Tigray, Oromia and Amhara regions as well as the situation for political opponents of the central government and political activists in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the report unpacks how the conflicts affect ordinary citizens as well as how the government employs an extensive surveillance apparatus to crack down on perceived dissent in light of said conflicts. Finally, the report covers conditions for returnees in Ethiopia.

The Danish Immigration Service (DIS) developed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the mission in consultation with the defined target users of the report, in particular the Secretariat of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board and the Asylum Division of DIS. The ToR is included in Annex 1 of this report. In the process of compiling this report, the delegation interviewed 12 sources comprising non-governmental organisations (NGOs), journalists, think tanks, human rights defenders, analysts and researchers. The delegation selected the sources interviewed based on their expertise, merit and experience relevant to the ToR.

The collection of data is based on multiple sourcing to ensure a high level of validity and balance of the data. The objective of including a variety of sources is to present a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to ToR at the time of publication. Thus, the present report is based on information from publicly available written sources, comprised of carefully selected news reports by credible news outlets, books, academic articles and reports published by other COI units, the United Nations, other international organisations as well as NGOs and humanitarian organisations.

These sources are complemented with information obtained through 12 interviews conducted either during a fact-finding mission to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia undertaken by DIS from 11 to 17 May 2024 or remotely before the mission. The minutes of the meetings with the consulted sources are listed in Annex 2.

Most interlocutors expressed concerns over their access to conflict zones and about their ability to publish and document human rights violations in light of the political situation in Ethiopia as of May 2024. The interviews were conducted in English. Prior to the interviews, all interlocutors were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the mission and the fact that their statements would be included in a report made publicly available. The interlocutors were asked how they wished to be introduced and quoted, and all sources are introduced and quoted according to their own wishes. Six out of 12 sources preferred anonymity. All meeting minutes were forwarded to the interlocutors for their approval and amendment, allowing them the opportunity to offer corrections or make comments on their statements. All sources responded and approved their statements. Care has been taken to present the views of the interlocutors as accurately and transparently as possible.

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For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the minutes of the interviews in Annex 2 have been numbered in a consecutive order, used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The quotation marks (“”) are not used in the report whenever the text is a copy of the meeting minutes, however, a reference is made in the footnotes to the paragraphs where the text is cited from. During the interview, the source may have highlighted issues that are not addressed in the ToR. As these issues could be relevant to refugee status determination, they are included in the meeting minutes in Annex 2, but not in the report.

The findings are presented in thematic chapters in line with the ToR, beginning with an overview of the general human rights situation, followed by chapters on the security situation in Tigray, Oromia and Amhara. These chapters include information about the treatment of persons with affiliation with opposition groups. A short chapter on the Somali region is included. Separate sections with information on gender issues and climate change have been added where it is relevant for an understanding of the situation. Finally, the report concludes with chapter about migration and conditions for returnees. The report contains information that addresses the topics specified in the ToR. This means, among other things, that the report does not cover issues related to the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC).

The report has been externally peer reviewed by CEDOCA, the COI-unit of the Belgian Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), in accordance with the EUAA COI Report Methodology.<sup>3</sup> The research and editing of this report was finalised on 19 September 2024.

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<sup>3</sup> EUAA, *Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2023, [url](#)

## Abbreviations and terminology

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ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
ARRA	Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs
AU	African Union
CEDOCA	Belgian COI-unit
CGRS	Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Belgium)
CoHA	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EDF	Eritrean Defence Force
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
EHRCO	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
EHRDC	Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defence Forces
EUAA	European Union Asylum Agency
Fano	Non-state Amhara militia
ICHREE	The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office the of High Commissioner for Human Rights
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
PP	Prosperity Party

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RRS	The Refugee and Returnee Service
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SoE	State of Emergency
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front

The terminology list is for the purpose of clarifying terms used in this report only. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

**OLA** The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) was formerly the armed wing of the OLF. After the OLF entered into a peace agreement with the federal government in January 2019, most of the OLA fighters laid down their weapons. However, some OLA factions are still engaged in the armed struggle with federal and national security forces in western and southern parts of Oromia.<sup>4</sup>

**OLF** The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is an Oromo nationalist opposition political party. The organisation is not homogenous and characterised by factionalism. The most recent split within the OLF came after the peace agreement with the government in 2018. One faction subsequently registered as a political party under the name OLA on 15 November 2019. The Ethiopian government refuses to call the OLA by its chosen name, instead referring to it as Shene or OLF-Shene.<sup>5</sup>

**Fano** Fano is an Amhara nationalist movement that was active during the 2016-2018 protests. The group emerged as an armed informal militia. However, since 2018, government security forces - both at the federal and the regional levels - had largely tolerated violence by Fano.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> DIS, *Ethiopia Political opposition parties – recent developments*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>5</sup> Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia to designate TPLF, OLF-Shene as ‘terror’ groups*, 1 May 2021, [url](#); DIS, *Ethiopia Political opposition parties – recent developments*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>6</sup> HRW, *“We Will Erase You from This Land” Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia’s Western Tigray Zone*, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

## Access to information

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Gathering information from Ethiopia about the human rights situation is a particular challenge: government pressure has led to a restricted information landscape over the past few years.<sup>7</sup>

The civic space and the freedom of speech in Ethiopia are deteriorating, as the government controls the environment for reporting on critical issues and the flow of information. The crackdown on the press undermines credible documentation and verification of human rights abuses and attacks.<sup>8</sup> Authorities harass and detain journalists and activists into silence or exile and restrict access to social media and internet.<sup>9</sup> Journalists fear reprisals<sup>10</sup> as many journalists have been killed or detained, and consequently the number of distinct media voices since 2019 have decreased.<sup>11</sup> An increasingly polarised political climate with disinformation, misinformation, a proliferation of biased information and access constraints further complicates the ability to obtain accurate and reliable information on security incidents.<sup>12</sup>

Federal and regional authorities have regularly arrested and mistreated journalists and human rights defenders<sup>13</sup> for not supporting the government narrative,<sup>14</sup> although journalist and long-time observer of Ethiopia Martin Plaut noted that there is some space for media to publish critical journalism.<sup>15</sup> In September 2023, the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC) stated that in the beginning of January 2023, there were 30 incidents of arrests involving journalists and human rights activists.<sup>16</sup> The EHRDC emphasised that as of May 2024, five journalists were forced to flee from Ethiopia in 2024 due to threats in comparison to six journalists in all of 2023.<sup>17</sup> An international researcher stated that Ethiopia has the second highest number of incarcerated journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, which impedes the flow of information.<sup>18</sup> The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) opined that over the past 32 years

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<sup>7</sup> CEDOCA, *Ethiopia: Security situation in Tigray*, 16 May 2024, [url](#), p. 4; for a discussion of specific problems about access to information about situation of Amharans in Addis Ababa, see Landinfo, *Etiopia: Forhold for amharer i Addis Abeba, i lys av konflikten i Amhara-regionen*, 27 June 2024, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024: Events of 2023 - Ethiopia*, 7 February 2024, [url](#); Denmark, DIS: *Ethiopia: An update on the security and human rights situation since February 2022*, 23 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4; USDOS, *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 23 April 2024, [url](#); A research institution: 10

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024: Events of 2023 - Ethiopia*, 7 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> USDOS, *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 23 April 2024, [url](#); Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: "We thought they would fight with those they came to fight with, not with us." Extrajudicial executions in Bahir Dar by ENDF soldiers*, 26 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> EPO ACLED, *EPO January 2023 Monthly: The Information Landscape in Ethiopia*, 8 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> Denmark, DIS: *Ethiopia: An update on the security and human rights situation since February 2022*, 23 September 2022, [url](#), p. 4; EPO ACLED, *EPO January 2023 Monthly: The Information Landscape in Ethiopia*, 8 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 55; Martin Plaut: 13

<sup>14</sup> USDOS, *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 23 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> Martin Plaut: 13

<sup>16</sup> USDOS, *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 23 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> EHRDC: 7

<sup>18</sup> International researcher: 3

of operation, it is the worst situation ever for operating as a human rights organisation.<sup>19</sup> In addition, EHRDC noted that the current trend reminds of the situation following the 2005 election, when the former administration targeted journalists and human rights activists.<sup>20</sup>

The government controls the state media, including radio, newspaper and television;<sup>21</sup> it interferes in the national media and actively acts as a producer of content for the various media accounts.<sup>22</sup> Reportedly, there is a so-called social media army advocating for the government's agenda that seeks to debunk the opposition's narrative.<sup>23</sup> The government tightly controls foreign correspondents by exclusion or refusal to renew visas.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the government periodically restricts and disrupts access to internet and blocks social media sites, especially in conflict areas.<sup>25</sup> The authorities have restricted access to social media platforms since protests broke out in Oromia in 2023 and disruption of the mobile internet in Amhara is common,<sup>26</sup> especially under the state of emergency.<sup>27</sup> Some regions have been described as 'media deserts' as there is a lack of accessible public channels to obtain information from.<sup>28</sup> For instance, the authorities have regularly restricted access for independent journalists and human rights investigators in Tigray, as well as parts of western and southern Oromia region and the Amhara region.<sup>29</sup> The lack of journalists, NGOs and independent monitors in conflict zones makes it difficult to obtain a coherent picture of the developments of the conflicts.<sup>30</sup> Very little information is available about the conflicts in Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia, and consequently it is difficult to verify human rights abuses and war crimes in these areas.<sup>31</sup> However, in the case of Amhara, professor Mehari Maru noted that, compared to the previous information blockade in Tigray, upholding an information blockade in Amhara is challenging due to insufficient amount of persons to enforce it. There will always be loopholes in the information blockade to Amhara.<sup>32</sup>

Despite a restricted environment for reporters and monitors, EHRCO highlighted that they have various methods of information gathering in the regions through human rights investigators at

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<sup>19</sup> EHRCO: 5

<sup>20</sup> EHRDC: 7

<sup>21</sup> A research institution: 10

<sup>22</sup> Academic researcher 32

<sup>23</sup> A research institution: 10

<sup>24</sup> Martin Plaut: 14

<sup>25</sup> USDOS, *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 23 April 2024, [url](#); EHRCO: 12

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024: Events of 2023 - Ethiopia*, 7 February 2024, [url](#); Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: "We thought they would fight with those they came to fight with, not with us." Extrajudicial executions in Bahir Dar by ENDF soldiers*, 26 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: "We thought they would fight with those they came to fight with, not with us." Extrajudicial executions in Bahir Dar by ENDF soldiers*, 26 February 2024, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>28</sup> EPO ACLED, *EPO January 2023 Monthly: The Information Landscape in Ethiopia*, 8 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 41; USDOS, *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 23 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> International researcher: 2

<sup>31</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024 – Ethiopia*, 29 February 2024, [url](#); international researcher: 1

<sup>32</sup> Mehari Maru: 13

the legal branch offices who are capable of receiving reports through various channels, including phone messages, calls, videos and other digital ways.<sup>33</sup> However, the Human Rights Council pointed to the politicisation of human rights, stating that in the current situation, human rights organisations must be careful about whom they receive information from. The council further stated that human rights organisations must conduct thorough background checks of victims in order to assess the validity of the information as some claims are manipulated, which complicates information gathering procedures. The government has a network of informants that can work against human rights defenders.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the arbitrary arrests of reporters and journalists demotivate victims to report about violations as they risk compromising their personal security, which composes another hindrance in the information gathering process.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> EHRCO: 3

<sup>34</sup> EHRCO: 4, 8

<sup>35</sup> EHRCO: 7

## 1. General human rights situation since 2022

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Chapters 4-6 in this report describe the security situation in the regions of Tigray, Amhara and Oromia respectively. This chapter describes the general human rights situation in Ethiopia as experienced and observed by the interviewed Ethiopian human rights organisations as well as documented by UN expert groups, researchers and in the media. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs extensively documented the human rights situation from December 2022 to December 2023 in the 2024 report.<sup>36</sup>

### 1.1. Human rights violations by state actors

The Office the of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Ethiopia has analysed the human rights situation in Ethiopia as of 2023 and found ‘gross human rights abuses and violations’.<sup>37</sup> One of the interviewed human rights organisations described the current situation as the worst in the organisation’s history of 32 years of human rights activism under different repressive regimes.<sup>38</sup> Taking one step back, UN experts argue that the current instability is due to a combination of Ethiopia’s history of ‘Political polarization concerning federalism and centralization and new and long-standing ethnic grievances have continued to destabilize Ethiopia.’<sup>39</sup>

The report to UN’s Human Rights Commission (HRC) documents that there are ‘reasonable grounds to believe’ that Ethiopian state actors – the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), Amhara Special Forces, the Afar Special Forces and the Oromia regional authorities – have committed serious human rights violations and abuses in Tigray and against Tigrayans elsewhere as well as in Oromia. Other regional actors, including the Eritrean Defense Forces, the Fano militias and Tigrayan fighters, have also failed to respect human rights.<sup>40</sup> The violations committed after the declaration of the SoE on 4 August 2023, stand out as systematic and widespread and include: ‘Arbitrary deprivations of the right to life, physical integrity, arbitrary arrests and detention, sexual violence, breaches of freedoms of association, expression, of movement, as well as abductions and enforced disappearances were recorded. The most common violations included arbitrary arrests and detentions, followed by killings of civilians, torture, enforced disappearances, and attacks on civilian property...’.<sup>41</sup>

Experts from the International Commission of Human Rights have identified ‘...grave and systematic violations of international law and crimes’, which had been committed in Tigray,

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<sup>36</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>38</sup> EHRCO: 2, 5

<sup>39</sup> HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia* [A/HRC/54/55], 15 September 2023, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>40</sup> HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia* [A/HRC/54/55], 15 September 2023, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>41</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 3



Amhara, Afar and Oromia.<sup>42</sup> During 2023, the expert group has documented 594 incidences of human rights violations and abuses. Compared to 2022, this represents an increase of 55.9 %; state actors estimated to be responsible for 70 % of these documented incidences (ENDF, federal police, regional police and special forces combined).<sup>43</sup> These incidences affected 8 253 individuals and included killings of 1 351 persons; most of the killings occurred in Amhara (740) followed by Oromia (366).<sup>44</sup> The violations include:

- killings (1 351 persons);
- injuries (796 persons);
- torture and inhuman treatment (346 persons);
- sexual violence (82 persons);
- arbitrary arrest/detention (5 411 persons);
- enforced disappearance/abduction (243 persons);
- property/personal items illegally appropriated by the state/non-state armed forces (24 persons).<sup>45</sup>

OHCHR states that the human rights situation in Tigray has improved ‘significantly’ and the level of human rights abuses and violence has been reduced after the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) on 2 November 2022, however, serious challenges remain because of limited demobilisation and reintegration of combatants.<sup>46</sup> There are reports of several cases of abductions and enforced disappearances committed by the Eritrean troops in Central Tigray zone after the CoHA as well as several extrajudicial killings of civilians by Amhara troops in Western Tigray Zone.<sup>47</sup> The CoHA in Tigray did install hope for a durable peace but the government then failed to live up to promises of ‘transitional justice and territorial integrity’.<sup>48</sup> In spite of this, in terms of conflicts and violent clashes, the worst affected regions are now Amhara and Oromia these two regions had the highest number of documented killings in 2023.<sup>49</sup>

## 1.2. Violations of international humanitarian law

The Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and their allied regional forces in Tigray have violated international humanitarian law since 3 November 2020, as documented by the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE). Furthermore, the

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<sup>42</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia [A/HRC/54/55]*, 15 September 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>43</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>44</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>45</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>46</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 4; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url, p. 8](#)

<sup>47</sup> CEDOCA, *Ethiopia: Security situation in Tigray*, 16 May 2024, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>48</sup> HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia [A/HRC/54/55]*, 15 September 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>49</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 6 figure 1

'...Tigrayan and allied fighters violated international humanitarian law in Amhara between July and December 2021 and in Afar between November 2021 and March 2022.'<sup>50</sup> In Amhara region, Ethiopian forces have unlawfully used hospitals as military bases and in November 2023, ENDF soldiers have interfered with medical treatment of patients at a hospital in North Gonder Zone in their search for wounded men that they believed to be Fano fighters, interventions that are against humanitarian law according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>51</sup>

The Ethiopian Government did not collaborate in the gathering of the documentation for the above-mentioned ICHREE report.<sup>52</sup> According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center, the prime minister actively neglects the dire humanitarian situation and exerts pressure on international humanitarian organisations to downplay the extent of people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>53</sup>

### 1.3. State of Emergency

As of 6 June 2024, the SoE, initially declared on 4 August 2023 in the Amhara region, had still not officially ended<sup>54</sup> in spite of the fact that it was supposed to expire after six months (3 June 2024).<sup>55</sup> The six months SoE had been declared under Emergency Proclamation no 6/2015 issued by the Council of Ministers to protect public peace and stability.<sup>56</sup> The SoE had been prompted by reports of increasing fighting in Amhara, Ethiopia's second biggest region, between Fano militias and the ENDF as well as numerous protests.<sup>57</sup> Fano militias fought along with the ENDF during the war in Tigray, but their relationship quickly deteriorated.<sup>58</sup> The Amhara regional administration stated that illegal activities accompanied by weapons had spread to an extent that required extra measures to maintain law and order and then declared the SoE.<sup>59</sup> When the SoE expired in February 2024, the parliament decided to renew it for another four months.<sup>60</sup> Even though the government declared the SoE for the Amhara region, the Minister of Justice immediately announced that it could also be implemented in other parts

<sup>50</sup> HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia* [A/HRC/54/55], 15 September 2023, [url](#), pp. 13-14

<sup>51</sup> HRW, "If the Soldier Dies, It's on You" Attacks on Medical Care in Ethiopia's Amhara Conflict, July 2024, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>52</sup> HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia* [A/HRC/54/55], 15 September 2023, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>53</sup> EHRDC: 31

<sup>54</sup> Borkena, *Ethiopia's state of emergency ends, Abiy Ahmed's gov't declines to declared it*, 6 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> OHCHR, *Ethiopia: UN Human Rights Chief calls for sustained efforts to halt violations and abuses*, 14 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 13; Fana, *State Of Emergency To Remain In Force For 6 Months: MoJ Minister*, 5 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>58</sup> Reuters, *Ethiopian military clashes with militia in Amhara, injuries reported*, 2 August 2023, [url](#); Reuters, *Ethiopia extends state of emergency in Amhara*, 2 February 2024, [url](#); Guardian, *Ethiopia declares a state of emergency in Amhara amid increasing violence*, 4 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>60</sup> Reuters, *Ethiopia extends state of emergency in Amhara*, 2 February 2024, [url](#); EHRDC, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Periodic Assessment of 2024 on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Ethiopia*, January 2024 to April 2024, 25 May 2024, [url](#), p. 2

of Ethiopia ‘as needed’.<sup>61</sup> The SoE had been applied across the country as a tool that has enabled the authorities to arrest people who criticise the government.<sup>62</sup>

To uphold the SoE the Ethiopian authorities established a General Command Post, which was headed by the Director General of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). It also comprises members of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s Prosperity Party, the ENDF, Federal Police and the Government Communication Service. This General Command Post oversees the SoE at federal level. The government established four other command posts in West Amhara, East Amhara, Northwest Amhara, and Central Showa.<sup>63</sup> According to one human rights organisation, several human rights activists have been detained at these command posts for prolonged periods without fair trials.<sup>64</sup>

The SoE criminalised ‘moral support’ to armed groups, suspended judicial review of detentions and – implicitly – restricted a range of otherwise non-derogable rights. The minimum and maximum penalties range from three to ten years of prison. According to OHCHR, there are 4 879 documented arrests during 2023 under this SoE. The arrested individuals are held in 16 different detention centres in 12 cities across the country. OHCHR states that many of these persons had been arbitrarily detained and subjected to prolonged detention before trial. Only 1 132 of these arbitrarily detained persons had been released by December 2023.<sup>65</sup>

### 1.4. Human rights organisations under pressure

The implementation of the SoE in 2023 has posed a significant threat to people in human rights organisations including increased risks of detention and abductions, in particularly in the Amhara region but also in Addis Ababa.<sup>66</sup> The interviewed human rights organisations stated that the number of human rights violations had increased over the past years; one organisation emphasised that in the course of 32 years of human rights activism under changing repressive regimes, the situation had never been worse.<sup>67</sup> Another organisation states that the challenge of the human rights work in Ethiopia is the combination of the ongoing, armed conflict, the implementation of the SoE and the shutdown of the internet.<sup>68</sup>

The space for national human rights organisations to monitor violations of human rights is shrinking rapidly: the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO),<sup>69</sup> established in 1991, reports

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<sup>61</sup> Fana, *State Of Emergency To Remain In Force For 6 Months: MoJ Minister*, 5 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> EHRCO: 12, 18

<sup>63</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>64</sup> EHRDC, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Periodic Assessment of 2024 on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Ethiopia*, January 2024 to April 2024, 25 May 2024, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>65</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>66</sup> EHRDC, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Periodic Assessment of 2024 on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Ethiopia*, January 2024 to April 2024, 25 May 2024, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>67</sup> EHRCO: 2, 5; EHRDC: 6-9; EHRDC: 3; EHRDC: 16, 17

<sup>68</sup> EHRDC, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Periodic Assessment of 2024 on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Ethiopia*, January 2024 to April 2024, 25 May 2024, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>69</sup> Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), 2020, [url](#)

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that human rights activists are under attack by the government and that the government has subjected EHRCO staff and volunteers across Ethiopia to arrest, harassment, intimidation and extrajudicial killing.<sup>70</sup> In May 2024, EHRCO listed the violent incidents that this organisation has experienced over the past years:

- On 11 February 2023, there was a break-in at EHRCO's office for Monitoring, Investigation, Documenting and Reporting Department where a laptop was taken from a locked drawer in the Department Head's office. EHRCO reported the incident to the local police but on 27 March 2023, the police arbitrarily detained three employees from this office at the Kirkos sub-district police station. The police took them to court on 28 March 2023, and the court released them on bail.
- On 18 March 2023, the Head of Department of the EHRCO was approached at his home and being threatened.
- On 25-27 April 2023, Oromia Police and Justice Bureau officials threatened EHRCO employees at a workshop in Adama City. The workshop was about the four EHRCO employees who the police released on bail after detention and the Police officials threatened to re-arrest them at any time.
- On 15 November 2023, three armed men in government security uniforms physically assaulted an EHRCO employee in the North Ethiopia Region office in Bahir Dar City. This happened a short time after he had completed an investigation into human rights violations in the Amhara region. During the attack, the attackers shot at him, and took his mobile phone and a flash drive with his investigation report as well as his personal ID cards.
- On 6 April 2024, two persons who were identified as government security employees but dressed as civilians came to the home of one of the leaders of EHRCO, issued threats, and warned him to stop his human rights activities.<sup>71</sup>

Another human rights organisation, Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC), founded in 2019,<sup>72</sup> has made a call of attention to the whereabouts of a well-known Amhara human rights activist who the authorities kidnapped and detained based on his anti-war engagement. When the authorities declared the SoE, they arrested this human rights activist during a trip to Barta, and he disappeared for several months. Ten months later, his family received information that the authorities had placed him in what the organisation described as a concentration camp in the Amhara region with no due process of law.<sup>73</sup> EHRDC described the current situation, as 'a complete disregard for the rule of law', comparing the current situation in Ethiopia under Meles Zenawi, former president (1991-95) and prime minister (1995-2012), noting that at least his administration enforced some form of rule of law throughout Ethiopia,

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<sup>70</sup> EHRCO, *Government's Escalating Crackdown Against EHRCO Ignites Heightened Alarm!*, 25 May 2024, X, [url](#); EHRCO: 2

<sup>71</sup> EHRCO, *Government's Escalating Crackdown Against EHRCO Ignites Heightened Alarm!*, 25 May 2024, X, [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> EHRDC, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Periodic Assessment of 2024 on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Ethiopia*, January 2024 to April 2024, 25 May 2024, [url](#), p. 2; EHRDC, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> EHRDC: 16

notwithstanding the human rights violations against critics, journalists and political opponents. By contrast – according to EHRDC – currently the Ethiopian air force/ENDF conducted drone attacks at a school on a Sunday in May 2023.<sup>74</sup> The OHCHR describes the use of drones by ENDF in 2023 as resulting in a ‘disproportionate levels of civilian casualties’.<sup>75</sup>

The Ethiopia’s Human Rights Commission (EHRC),<sup>76</sup> which is a federal institution under the constitution and accountable directly to the Ethiopian parliament,<sup>77</sup> is operational and active, but the SoE has made the work of the EHRC more challenging in terms of accessing regions and finding resources to fund the work, especially as the workload is increasing during conflicts. From July 2023 to March 2024, the EHRC received approximately 1 218 complaints concerning 1 496 individuals of which 70.4 % were processed and 78.7 % were solved by the EHRC. In cases where the EHRC does not investigate the cases, they are referred to the court or the Ombudsman. The public knows the EHRC, and they report incidents of torture, forced disappearance, detention, internal displacement, accessibility for persons with disability, ill treatment, etc. to the EHRC.<sup>78</sup>

### 1.5. Media and the treatment of journalists

The authorities restrain the freedom of expression during the SoE as well as before its declaration. Journalists have been imprisoned in increasing numbers after they have voiced their political opinions. As of May 2024, one of the interviewed organisations knew of at least 11 journalists in jail.<sup>79</sup> According to OHCHR, the authorities have arrested at least 12 male journalists since the declaration of the SoE. Some of these journalists are held in detention centers in Afar, others are held at Kaliti Prison in Addis Ababa.<sup>80</sup>

In March 2024, several journalists, including some employed by the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation and Fana Broadcasting Corporate (FBC) had been detained in Addis Ababa after having participated in the “Adwa barefoot” project – a march to celebrate the Ethiopian fight against the Italian colonial army.<sup>81</sup>

From February to July 2023, the Ethiopian authorities restricted access to social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok.<sup>82</sup> According to a research institution, the Ethiopian government exercises control over the state media, including radio,

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<sup>74</sup> EHRDC: 16, 17

<sup>75</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>76</sup> EHRC, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> HRW, “*If the Soldier Dies, It’s on You*” *Attacks on Medical Care in Ethiopia’s Amhara Conflict*, July 2024, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>78</sup> EHRC: 2

<sup>79</sup> An academic researcher: 31

<sup>80</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>81</sup> Borkena, *Ethiopia : Barefoot Club member Journalists Held Captive in Adwa Celebration Crackdown*, 2 March 2024, [url](#); EHRDC, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Periodic Assessment of 2024 on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Ethiopia*, January 2024 to April 2024, 25 May 2024, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>82</sup> Addis Standard, *News: Internet shutdown costs Ethiopia nearly \$2 billion in economic upheaval*, 9 January 2024, [url](#)

newspaper and television. Media reports have documented the existence of a social media ‘army’ that advocates for the government’s agenda, and that actively seeks to discredit the opposition’s narratives; they follow activists’ social media accounts and challenge them online.<sup>83</sup>

## 1.6. Gender issues and human rights violations

In spite of a lack of complete gender-disaggregated data, there is ample evidence to suggest that the armed conflict and violence across Ethiopia affect men and women differently.<sup>84</sup> Out of the 1 351 killings in 2023, which have been documented by the OHCHR, 1 121 were male, whereas 96 were female (and 134 of unknown gender); by contrast, all of the documented victims of sexual violence were female.<sup>85</sup> Sexual violence is generally underreported in Ethiopia.<sup>86</sup>

Both the ENDF and the Ethiopian government’s security forces have been involved in rape and other forms of conflict related sexual violence in Amhara, Oromia and Tigray regions against women and girls. The documented sexual violence have been perpetrated by the ENDF, Amhara Regional Forces, Oromia Regional Special Forces, Oromia Police, Eritrean Defense Forces and the Selam Askebari Militia.<sup>87</sup>

During the war in Tigray, documentation shows that men and women died from different causes. Men were more likely to be killed through ‘direct methods such as mass killings’, whereas women in Tigray were more likely to die due to starvation, rape, looting and destruction of infrastructure.<sup>88</sup> During the Tigray war, women were massively targeted and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was used as a weapon of war.<sup>89</sup> According to one qualitative study, rape was not regarded as a taboo during that time of war, and the TPLF has been accused of constant physical and sexual brutality against Amhara women.<sup>90</sup> According to author and journalist Tom Gardner, it is estimated that 10 000 Tigrayan women – and quite plausibly ten times more – have been brutally raped in the course of the conflict.<sup>91</sup>

The interviewed human rights organisations confirmed the gender differentiated experiences of violent conflict: men are more likely to be arrested; women are vulnerable to any form of

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<sup>83</sup> A research institution: 10; Borkena, *Investigative report reveals gov’t “media army” disseminate misleading, false information*, 19 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> Tafesework, G., *The role of women in national and sub-national peace processes in Ethiopia*, Rift Valley Institute, 2024, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>85</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>86</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>87</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>88</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 15 September 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>89</sup> EHRDC: 20. For more information about the Tigray war, refer to pp. 15-16 in Denmark, DIS: *Ethiopia: An update on the security and human rights situation since February 2022*, 23 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> Desalegn, S., Kasseye, E., Gebeyaw, G., & Meshelemiah, J. C. A., *The Challenges of Women Housed in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps During an Armed Conflict in Ethiopia*. *Affilia*, 38(1), 2023, [url](#), pp. 55-74

<sup>91</sup> Gardner, T., *The Abiy Project: God, Power and War in the New Ethiopia*, Hurst, 2024, p. 283-284

harassment. Gender-based violence has become a common practice in most parts of the country, especially in the regions with armed conflict. However, there are incidents of arrests of female activists during a Fano-related incident in Addis Ababa.<sup>92</sup> There are a number of women combatants, who might have been forced to fight during the conflicts. Female combatants face challenges in the process of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration. For instance, they may have a difficult time being reintegrated into a society with a patriarchal structure as being a female combatant is associated with stigmatisation and social exclusion because the women has transgressed traditional female values in order to engage in fighting.<sup>93</sup> The national peace process – and more precisely the National Dialogue Commission – has been criticised for only including women without any attempts of tackling the socio-cultural barriers to women’s participation and for selecting women based on their political affiliation to the ruling Prosperity Party.<sup>94</sup>

Displacement is another factor, which makes women vulnerable to a myriad of risks and challenges, as women are more likely than men to suffer from marginalisation as documented in a qualitative study from two IDP camps in Ethiopia with data collected during the Tigray war.<sup>95</sup> Women who are displaced face challenges that are systemic (gender based violence; family separation, human trafficking, genocide); psychological (trauma and stress, loss of home and belongings) and social (lack of social security and stability, reintegration and resettlement problems and unmet basic needs). Sexual violence is particularly associated with feelings of shame, astonishment, horror and victimisation, as documented in this 2023 qualitative study.<sup>96</sup> Ethiopia has almost 4.5 million IDPs.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> EHRDC: 20

<sup>93</sup> EHRCO: 19

<sup>94</sup> Tafesework, G., *The role of women in national and sub-national peace processes in Ethiopia*, Rift Valley Institute, 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>95</sup> EHRCO: 16; Desalegn, S., Kasseye, E., Gebeyaw, G., & Meshelemiah, J. C. A., *The Challenges of Women Housed in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps During an Armed Conflict in Ethiopia*. *Affilia*, 38(1), 2023, [url](#), pp. 55-74

<sup>96</sup> EHRCO: 16; Desalegn, S., Kasseye, E., Gebeyaw, G., & Meshelemiah, J. C. A., *The Challenges of Women Housed in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps During an Armed Conflict in Ethiopia*. *Affilia*, 38(1), 2023, [url](#), pp. 55-74

<sup>97</sup> OHCHR, *Update on the human rights situation in Ethiopia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 14



## 2. Government surveillance of citizens

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Surveillance of citizens in Ethiopia takes multiple forms: digitally, via wire-tapping, physically, via informants<sup>98</sup> and possibly also financially, via the monitoring of financial transactions.<sup>99</sup>

The National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) is the organisation assigned to gather information ‘necessary to protect national security’.<sup>100</sup>

One of the interviewed sources described how mass surveillance takes place in different sectors; on university campuses, members of a study group may be under surveillance. In the rural areas, agricultural extension workers may conduct surveillance during their outreach activities where they present farmers with agricultural technologies. In the health sector, authorities may use outreach agents within WASH services (water, sanitation and hygiene<sup>101</sup>) to conduct surveillance of the population. According to one source, health professionals, teachers and people of a legal background are among the most vocal ones when it comes to political issues and therefore the authorities will most likely follow them.<sup>102</sup>

According to the EHRC, it is unclear on which grounds the authorities are likely to initiate surveillance of citizens.<sup>103</sup> The intensity of mass surveillance had increased since 2018, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power,<sup>104</sup> and increasingly so since the declaration of the SoE in August 2023 in the Amhara region.<sup>105</sup> Clingendael, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, has described how previous governments’ surveillance of citizens historically has been enabled by at least three factors: ‘Ethiopia’s history of centralised rule supported by powerful law enforcement agencies, selective law enforcement and poor treatment of suspects.’<sup>106</sup>

The intensity of the current government’s monitoring of the population remains unclear. One source opined that the intensity of surveillance seems to increase during public holidays, when people typically gather in groups for various events.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Freedom House: *Freedom in the World 2024 - Ethiopia*, 2024, [url](#); Associate professor: 15

<sup>99</sup> EHRC: 43

<sup>100</sup> NISS, *NISS*, n.d., [url](#); van Veen, E., *Perpetuating power: Ethiopia’s political settlement and the organization of security*, September 2016, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>101</sup> In Ethiopia WASH agents visit people in selected *woredas* (districts) across the country where they have direct access to the families, see UNICEF, *2020 Summary Findings from Sustainability Checks for Rural WASH in Ethiopia – Technical Paper*, [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> An academic researcher: 17

<sup>103</sup> EHRC: 44

<sup>104</sup> An international researcher: 23

<sup>105</sup> EHRC: 43

<sup>106</sup> van Veen, E., *Perpetuating power: Ethiopia’s political settlement and the organization of security*, September 2016, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>107</sup> EHRC: 44



## 2.1. Digital surveillance

The Ethiopian government has purchased a surveillance system in 2021 that allows the authorities to hack into people’s mobile phones; according to the United States Department of State, the authorities have made extensive use of these surveillance technologies in order to spy on citizens, politicians and detainees.<sup>108</sup> In June 2024, the Ethiopian government submitted a bill to the parliament seeking permission to intercept personal communication without a court warrant. The government justified the action with reference to the need for further investigation into possible money laundering and financing of terrorism.<sup>109</sup>

The authorities are most likely to surveil prominent members of political parties, but may also surveil lower-ranked members if they become the object of interest to the authorities.<sup>110</sup> The interviewed sources confirmed that digital mass-surveillance for any signs of anti-government activity is a common practice.<sup>111</sup> The authorities tap ordinary phone calls, including encrypted calls on WhatsApp. The authorities have presented intercepted WhatsApp calls in court as evidence. Furthermore, the authorities monitor online activity on social media.<sup>112</sup>

The federal authorities have a substantial number of agents who are assigned to closely monitor the online activities of citizens where note is taken of what a surveilled person likes, comments on or shares, for example on Facebook.<sup>113</sup> For instance, one agent may have 5 or 6 accounts to monitor on social media.<sup>114</sup> When the authorities detain political activists and journalists, the starting point of their indictment in courts has always been material found on social media, according to the observations of a research institution.<sup>115</sup>

## 2.2. Physical surveillance

One source described the widespread use of informants or ordinary citizens that are assigned to physically follow any person that they suspect of something in order to monitor this person’s daily activities.<sup>116</sup> The system is called ‘one-to-five’ system. The authorities established this network of informants in 2011 and based it on a model where the authorities assigned new party members to monitor five people. Journalist and author, Tom Gardner, has described Ethiopia as a ‘surveillance state’ where newly elected EPRDF party members had been assigned persons to monitor within their own networks – e.g. their universities, prisons, businesses, schools – or households.<sup>117</sup> The Clingendael Institute has analysed the Ethiopian surveillance

<sup>108</sup> USDOS, *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 23 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>109</sup> BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian bill seeks power to intercept personal communications*, Wazema Radio, 11 June 2024; Addis Standard, *News: Parliament considers bill allowing interception of communications without court order in crime, terrorism cases*, 12 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>110</sup> An international researcher: 24

<sup>111</sup> An associate professor: 15; a research institution: 10

<sup>112</sup> An academic researcher: 15; EHRC: 43, 45

<sup>113</sup> A research institution: 10; an international researcher: 24

<sup>114</sup> EHCR: 45

<sup>115</sup> A research institution: 10

<sup>116</sup> An academic researcher: 16

<sup>117</sup> Gardner, T., *The Abiy Project: God, Power and War in the New Ethiopia*, Hurst, 2024, p. 60

system and found it has been a core element of state security and intelligence gathering over time: 'This term dates back to the military junta's rule during which it referred to an intrusive policy of surveillance based on intelligence gathered from informers in one out of every five households. This generated a legacy of distrust that persists today. More recently, the term referred to the TPLF/EPRDF's 2005 post-election aim of having one in every five households being party-affiliated.'<sup>118</sup> This very close monitoring has been described as consecutive governments' efforts to monitor and control citizens very closely: '..., other interviewees largely continued to consider 'one-in-five' as an effort to establish 'deeper control' over their daily lives, and to perceive many of the 'one-in-five' households as party-affiliated.'<sup>119</sup>

According to one source, the authorities reactivated this system soon after the elections in 2022. This system of informers is so efficient that it is difficult to 'fly under the radar' for any citizen who wishes that their political activities remain unknown to the authorities once the indicated informer has started to follow this person. The informer could be the suspected person's own neighbour, and surveillance therefore may begin right at the suspected person's doorstep.<sup>120</sup> By contrast, two other interviewed researchers stated that, it is possible for targeted people to stay under the radar depending on the willingness to take risks and given that they dispossess themselves of their ID cards, which in turn limits the person's access to rights and services as well as job opportunities.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> van Veen, E., *Perpetuating power: Ethiopia's political settlement and the organization of security*, September 2016, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>119</sup> van Veen, E., *Perpetuating power: Ethiopia's political settlement and the organization of security*, September 2016, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>120</sup> An academic researcher: 16

<sup>121</sup> Mehari Maru: 14; an international researcher: 26

### 3. Climate change and the impact on people affected by conflict

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Ethiopia, as well as other countries in the East African region, is highly vulnerable to climate change. Recurring floods and droughts in the country have exacerbated Ethiopia's situation, which is already a challenging humanitarian situation due to the conflict. These droughts and floods affect food security and livelihoods, especially among those already displaced by conflicts.<sup>122</sup>

#### 3.1. Impact of drought and flooding

Ethiopia is experiencing one of its most severe droughts in decades, following four consecutive failed rainy seasons. This has led to widespread food insecurity and the loss of livelihoods, particularly in the Somali region, where over 1.4 million heads of livestock have died.<sup>123</sup> Drought forces people to migrate to urban areas in search of work and livelihoods, further straining urban infrastructure and services.<sup>124</sup> The Somali region's three consecutive below-average rainy seasons have exacerbated already dire conditions for over 50 % of the population.<sup>125</sup>

Flooding has also become a significant threat. In mid-2021, flooding affected 617 000 people, causing large-scale losses of livestock and crops.<sup>126</sup> In 2023, unprecedented floods in South-Eastern Ethiopia, Somalia, and northern Kenya displaced millions and destroyed vital infrastructure.<sup>127</sup> In the Somali region, around 240 000 people were forcibly displaced by floods, and 1 000 hectares of crops were wiped out.<sup>128</sup> Damaged sanitation infrastructure has heightened the risk of infectious diseases, such as cholera.<sup>129</sup>

#### 3.2. Compounding effects of conflict and climate change

The intersection of climate change and the ongoing conflicts have worsened the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia. In Tigray, the conflict has exacerbated food insecurity and reduced the

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<sup>122</sup> International Rescue Committee, *Crisis in Ethiopia: Climate change meets conflict*, 5 January 2022, [url](#); NUPI & SIPRI, *Ethiopia: Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet*, June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network, *Conflict, climate change and displacement in the Somali Region of Ethiopia*, 13 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> International Rescue Committee, *Crisis in Ethiopia: Climate change meets conflict*, 5 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network, *Conflict, climate change and displacement in the Somali Region of Ethiopia*, 13 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> International Rescue Committee, *Crisis in Ethiopia: Climate change meets conflict*, 5 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> UNHCR, *Climate and conflict – aggregating humanitarian crises in Ethiopia*, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>128</sup> UNHCR, *Climate and conflict – aggregating humanitarian crises in Ethiopia*, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>129</sup> UNHCR, *Climate and conflict – aggregating humanitarian crises in Ethiopia*, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

capacity of both state and community levels to adapt livelihoods to the consequences of climate change.<sup>130</sup>

Displacement caused by conflict is often compounded by climate-related displacement, creating a cycle of recurrent displacement without durable solutions. For instance, in April 2023, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced due to drought in the Somali region, only to face further displacement due to floods from May to November the same year.<sup>131</sup> According to Fekadu Adugna Tufa, Associate Professor of Social Anthropology at Addis Ababa University, this recurrent displacement places a significant strain on already limited resources and hampers the ability of affected populations to recover and rebuild their lives.<sup>132</sup>

The conflict and climate change intersection also affects the ability of humanitarian organisations to provide aid and support. Political instability and ongoing violence create unsafe conditions for aid workers and disrupt supply chains, making it difficult to deliver essential services and relief to those in need. For example, damaged infrastructure from floods can block access to basic health care services, and the presence of armed groups can hinder the distribution of food and medical supplies.<sup>133</sup>

Furthermore, access to land and water has been a critical issue, with insufficient rainfall and prolonged droughts increasing pasture shortages. This has led to conflicts among pastoralist and agro-pastoral communities with tensions potentially spilling over into neighbouring regions, such as South Sudan and Kenya. As resources become scarce, competition for these resources intensifies, leading to more frequent violent clashes.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> NUPI & SIPRI, *Ethiopia: Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet*, June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>131</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network, *Conflict, climate change and displacement in the Somali Region of Ethiopia*, 13 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network, *Conflict, climate change and displacement in the Somali Region of Ethiopia*, 13 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> UNHCR, *Climate and conflict – aggregating humanitarian crises in Ethiopia*, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> NUPI & SIPRI, *Ethiopia: Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet*, June 2022, [url](#)

## 4. Security situation - Amhara

### 4.1. Background of the conflict in Amhara

The Amhara region, Ethiopia's second largest and second most populous, is home to more than 23 million people. Geographically, it shares borders with four Ethiopian regions: Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Oromia, and Tigray and Sudan to the west. The majority of its residents are ethnic Amhara; however, there is a significant Oromo population, particularly in the Oromo Special Zone within the Amhara region.<sup>135</sup>

Only nine months after the CoHA in November 2022, ending the two-year war in Tigray, armed conflict broke out in Amhara between the Fano and the ENDF. Tensions rose after the federal government announced its plans on 6 April 2023 to dismantle regional forces across Ethiopia and integrate them into security forces.<sup>136</sup>

The situation in Amhara has been volatile since April 2023.<sup>137</sup> Towards the end of April 2023, a series of assassinations of regional and political personnel, who had supported the demobilisation of special forces, began with the killing of the head of the Amhara faction of the Prosperity Party.<sup>138</sup> Reportedly, armed attackers targeted 13 political and security officials across the region, which forced many local and security officials to leave their towns, creating a security vacuum and a deteriorated security situation in Amhara.<sup>139</sup> The killings of local and security officials continued, which left the local governments ineffective and non-functional in many places of Amhara.<sup>140</sup> Fano militias and Amhara nationalists have accused both the federal and regional governments of being dominated by ethnic Oromos, and hence, they have shown little trust in the new regional government to resolve the key concerns of the Amhara people.<sup>141</sup>

On 4 August 2023, the federal government declared SoE for six months in Amhara following days of clashes in the Amhara region between the military and local armed fighters<sup>142</sup> and because of the capturing of major cities in Amhara by Fano.<sup>143</sup> The SoE, though covering the Amhara region, can be applied across the entire country when deemed necessary by the

<sup>135</sup> HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>136</sup> HRW, *"If the Soldier Dies, It's on You" Attacks on Medical Care in Ethiopia's Amhara Conflict*, July 2024, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>137</sup> An international organisation: 12

<sup>138</sup> HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), pp. 17-18; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 14; ACLED EPO, *EPO August 2023 Monthly: Conflict in Amhara Region*, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO August 2023 Monthly: Conflict in Amhara Region*, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>140</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 14; ACLED EPO, *EPO August 2023 Monthly: Conflict in Amhara Region*, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>141</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO August 2023 Monthly: Conflict in Amhara Region*, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>142</sup> Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia declares state of emergency following clashes in Amhara*, 4 August 2023, [url](#);

<sup>143</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Military Executes Dozens in Amhara Region*, April 2024, [url](#)

Ethiopian authorities<sup>144</sup> allowing the authorities to disregard certain elements of the rule of law, such as banning gatherings and allowing arrest and detention without court order.<sup>145</sup> During the SoE, government forces had carte blanche to engage in extrajudicial arrest of thousands, including holding prominent Amhara parliamentarians in detention for months without legal recourse.<sup>146</sup> On 2 February 2024, the government extended the SoE for another four months.<sup>147</sup> In August 2023, a senior federal official reported that half of Amhara Special Forces members had joined Fano units rather than demobilise.<sup>148</sup> For more information on the human rights violations during the SoE, please refer to Chapter 1.1: [General human rights violations since 2022](#).

## 4.2. Actors in the conflict

The conflict in Amhara is marked by the presence of both state and non-state armed actors. State armed groups active in the region include the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), the Federal Police, the Amhara Police, the Amhara local militia, and the Amhara Anti-Riot Force. Among the non-state armed groups are the Fano, which is a movement of decentralised groups. It is difficult to distinguish between the state-affiliated ‘Amhara militia’, ‘Amhara Special Forces’ and ‘Amhara Fano militia’.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, Eritrean forces have trained and supplied weapons to Fano during the Tigray war. Reportedly, Fano forces are still being trained in Eritrea.<sup>150</sup> The movement is initially fragmented with a decentralised structure and membership is informal,<sup>151</sup> although it has become a well-organised military wing over the past 8 months to 1 year.<sup>152</sup> Its use of violence previously made Fano unpopular amongst Amhara people.<sup>153</sup> The signing of the CoHA and the government’s plan to disband the regional Special Forces led to rise of Amhara nationalism and hence the popularity of Fano increased.<sup>154</sup> According to Mehari Maru, many Amharas may side with Fano in the conflict as Fano has proved a resistance to ENDF.<sup>155</sup> Landinfo finds that Amharas are reluctant to join the Ethiopian

<sup>144</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 14-15; Al Jazeera, *What’s behind the crisis in Ethiopia’s Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August, [url](#); An international organisation: 12; EHRDC: 13

<sup>145</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 14-15; Al Jazeera, *What’s behind the crisis in Ethiopia’s Amhara region? A simple guide*, 10 August, [url](#);

<sup>146</sup> Foreign Policy, *Ethiopia’s Amhara Conflict Could Spark Civil War*, 6 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>147</sup> Reuters, *Ethiopia extends state of emergency in Amhara*, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>148</sup> HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>149</sup> Rift Valley Institute, *Amhara region*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 3; ACLED EPO, *Amhara regional Profile*, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>150</sup> EHRDC: 30

<sup>151</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 34; International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia’s Ominous New War in Amhara*, 16 November 2023, [url](#); A research institute:13

<sup>152</sup> Mehari Maru: 8

<sup>153</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 34; EHRDC: 23

<sup>154</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 34; International Crisis Group, *Crisiswatch, Ethiopia*, May 2024, [url](#); A research institute: 11; International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia’s Ominous New War in Amhara*, 16 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>155</sup> Mehari Maru: 11

national forces as these forces are primarily composed of soldiers from Oromia and managed by people from Oromia.<sup>156</sup>

Moreover, drone attacks, mass arrest and targeting of civilians by the federal government has generated increased public support towards Fano. According to the EHRDC, more than 75 % of youth in Amhara have joined Fano.<sup>157</sup> Since the war in Amhara erupted, the Fano militia aim at fighting the federal government.<sup>158</sup> The militias have been able to control many rural areas in the Amhara region,<sup>159</sup> while the militia generally conduct ambush attacks against the ENDF and political opponents in urban areas<sup>160</sup> and challenge the federal government through its hit-and-run tactics.<sup>161</sup> Conversely, government forces mostly control towns and main roads.<sup>162</sup>

Another actor in the region is the OLA/OLF-Shane, along with Oromo Ethnic militia, which engage in battles against Amhara militias in the Oromo special zone in Amhara.<sup>163</sup>

### 4.3. Conflict dynamics in and types of violence

In August 2023, violence escalated in the Amhara region as armed clashes between Fano militias and the ENDF erupted when the federal army intensified the disarmament of the Amhara regional Special Forces and Amhara militias.<sup>164</sup> The violence included heavy fighting in and around cities and towns across the Amhara region resulting in killing of civilians and damage to property.<sup>165</sup> In August 2023, ACLED recorded 170 violent events and 541 reported fatalities in Ethiopia, with the majority of political violence cases recorded in Amhara.<sup>166</sup> For the period of December 2022 to December 2023, the federal army was responsible for most of the violence against civilians in the Amhara region, followed by Fano militias.<sup>167</sup>

Armed clashes also broke out in August 2023 between Fano militias and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Dera woreda, which is a disputed territory located on the border between the Amhara and Oromia regions. Both Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups reside in this area, and

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<sup>156</sup> Landinfo, *Etiopia; Konflikten i Amhara*, 20 June 2024, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>157</sup> EHRDC: 23

<sup>158</sup> ACLED EPO, *The Fano Insurgency: Main Hurdles to Unifying Fano*, 19 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>159</sup> ACLED EPO, *The Fano Insurgency: Main Hurdles to Unifying Fano*, 19 January 2024, [url](#); An International Organisation: 21

<sup>160</sup> ACLED EPO, *The Fano Insurgency: Main Hurdles to Unifying Fano*, 19 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>161</sup> International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara*, 16 November 2023, [url](#); Mehari Maru: 1

<sup>162</sup> An International organisation: 21

<sup>163</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO November 2023 Monthly: An Evolving Conflict Environment in Oromia*, 14 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO August 2023 Monthly: Conflict in Amhara Region*, 8 September 2023, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 33; An international organisation: 12

<sup>165</sup> Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *The human rights impact of the armed conflict on civilians in Amhara Regional State*, 14 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>166</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO August 2023 Monthly: Conflict in Amhara Region*, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>167</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 34



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Amhara residents have petitioned for this area to be administered by the Amhara region for the last two decades.<sup>168</sup>

Since August 2023, the level of violence has remained high in Amhara,<sup>169</sup> and throughout 2023, hostilities between Fano and the federal forces persisted in the region with most clashes occurring in the rural areas with the use of drone strikes, air strikes and heavy artillery.<sup>170</sup> Reportedly, the authorities established checkpoints across the region to prevent Amharas from travelling to Addis Ababa, raising concerns of ethnic profiling.<sup>171</sup>

In December 2023, ACLED's Ethiopia Peace Observatory recorded 34 battles between the ENDF and Fano militias, with the ENDF conducting at least three drone strikes resulting in about 50 reported fatalities in December.<sup>172</sup> In total, ACLED reported 200 fatalities in Amhara in December 2023.<sup>173</sup>

On 29 January 2024, members of the ENDF murdered dozens of civilians in the small town, Merawi, in Amhara. The killings were reportedly motivated by revenge, although the government denies to have killed civilians.<sup>174</sup> Reportedly, the episode is one of the most violent and deadliest since attacks in August 2023.<sup>175</sup>

In March 2024, hostilities in Amhara intensified, and fighting between Fano and federal forces reached major towns for the first time since August 2023, including the capital of the region, Bahir Dar. Fano confirmed kidnapping 270 youth based on accusations of affiliation with government forces. In April 2024, the first clashes between security forces and Fano spilled over to Addis Ababa, killing civilians, based on government accusations of planning 'a terrorist attack'. Meanwhile, fights continued in Amhara with the government's attempt to defeat Fano.<sup>176</sup> ACLED recorded more political violence in April 2024 compared to previous months, with Amhara continuing to be the region with the highest number of insurgencies accounting 70 violent events and 314 reported fatalities.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO August 2023 Monthly: Conflict in Amhara Region*, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>169</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO December 2023 Monthly | The Fano Insurgency: Main Hurdles to Unifying Fano*, 19 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>170</sup> International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch, Ethiopia*, November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> BBC, *Why Ethiopia's Amhara militiamen are battling the army*, 16 August, [url](#); International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara*, 16 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>172</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO December 2023 Monthly | The Fano Insurgency: Main Hurdles to Unifying Fano*, 19 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>173</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO December 2023 Monthly | The Fano Insurgency: Main Hurdles to Unifying Fano*, 19 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>174</sup> Foreign Policy, *Ethiopia's Amhara Conflict Could Spark Civil War*, 6 March 2024, [url](#); BBC, *Amhara conflict: Ethiopians massacred in their homes by government troops*, 13 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> BBC, *Amhara conflict: Ethiopians massacred in their homes by government troops*, 13 February 2024, [url](#); Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Military Executes Dozens in Amhara Region*, April 2024, [url](#); Foreign Policy, *Ethiopia's Amhara Conflict Could Spark Civil War*, 6 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>176</sup> International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch, Ethiopia*, November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>177</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update | April 2024 Abiy Ahmed's Sixth Year*, 13 May 2024, [url](#)



The current security situation in Amhara is dire with arbitrary killings, arrests and an increasing number of IDPs.<sup>178</sup> According to Mehari Maru, the situation in Amhara has transitioned from sporadic skirmishes to a well-organised and coordinated conflict covering the whole Amhara region that is marked by intense fighting and instability.<sup>179</sup> The security situation is worst in Gojjam, Gondor, Wollo and Shewa based on attempts to fight the federal government. The federal army has taken measures that include killings of civilians.<sup>180</sup> The government occasionally conducts indiscriminate drone attacks in Amhara.<sup>181</sup> Drone attacks have targeted Fino Selam, Debre Birhan, Wegel Tena, while there are reports of killings in Bahir Dar, Mota and Degala.<sup>182</sup> Two human rights organisations noted that they had to scale down their monitoring activities in Amhara due to the deteriorating security situation.<sup>183</sup> The Foreign Policy describes the series of violent events in Amhara as a sign of a worrying shift in the conflict's nature. As the armed confrontation persists, government soldiers begin to perceive broader communities as complicit in the rebellion, resulting in a greater propensity for collective punishment against Amhara communities. This escalating cycle intensifies animosity and perpetuates violence.<sup>184</sup>

#### 4.4. Humanitarian situation

Amhara region has high malnutrition rates due to a combination of drought in some areas and unusual rainfall and severe storms in other areas as well as the ongoing fighting in large parts of the region.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, the federal government has exacerbated this situation as the authorities have denied farmers in Amhara access to critical resources, such as fertilisers and seedlings. The absence of these critical agricultures resources has created a famine-like situation and starvation in the Amhara region, according to the academic researcher.<sup>186</sup> In October 2023, Addis Standard reported at least 18 starvation deaths.<sup>187</sup> According to projections from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network for the period June–September 2024, parts of Amhara will be in category 3 (crisis) on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), which classifies the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and acute malnutrition.<sup>188</sup> The situation is predicted to be most challenging in most of East Gojjam, North Wollo, South Wollo, and North Shewa. Parts of Central Gondar and South Gondar are classified

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<sup>178</sup> EHRCO: 9

<sup>179</sup> Mehari Maru: 1

<sup>180</sup> Mehari Maru: 1

<sup>181</sup> A research institute: 17

<sup>182</sup> Mehari Maru: 1

<sup>183</sup> EHRC: 24; EHRCO: 12

<sup>184</sup> Foreign Policy, *Ethiopia's Amhara Conflict Could Spark Civil War*, 6 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>185</sup> SIDA, *Humanitarian Crisis Analysis – Ethiopia*, 31 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 2-4; Academic researcher: 21; Norway, Landinfo, *Temanotat Etiopia: Konflikten i Amhara*, 20 June 2024, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>186</sup> Academic researcher: 21

<sup>187</sup> Addis Standard, *News: At least 18 people die of drought-related hunger in two districts of Waghemra, North Gonder zones, Amhara region*, 2 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>188</sup> IPC, *Understanding the IPC Scales*, 2017, [url](#), p. 3

in category 2 (stressed), while the western parts of Amhara (West and Central Gondar, Awi, Bahir Dar, North, West, and East Gojjam) are categorised at level 1 (minimal).<sup>189</sup>

The ongoing conflict in the Amhara region has also led to the region being classified by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as 'Partially Accessible' or 'Hard-to-reach' for aid workers.<sup>190</sup> The shutdown of telecommunications systems including internet services in Amhara complicates the coordination of a humanitarian response even further.<sup>191</sup>

The conflict is heavily affecting access to education.<sup>192</sup> In early October 2023, the Amhara Education Bureau released a report stating that about 3.9 million students, out of six million, were unable to continue their education. Some schools were able to resume classes in April 2024.<sup>193</sup> On 6 November 2023, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) announced seven deaths because of a bombing of a primary school by a government-operated drone. The UN agency stated that Fano members had reportedly occupied parts of the school grounds before the airstrike.<sup>194</sup>

According to Project HOPE, the ongoing conflict has brought the health system in Amhara to the brink of collapse.<sup>195</sup> The Amhara Regional Health Bureau is reporting a wave of communicable and non-communicable diseases, including outbreaks of measles, malaria, and cholera.<sup>196</sup> Data from the Health Bureau shows that more than 270 health facilities have been looted.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Famine Early Warning Systems Network, *Ethiopia Acute Food Insecurity, July - September 2024 projected outcomes*, July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>190</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA: National Access map*, 31 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>191</sup> An international organisation: 13

<sup>192</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, *ETHIOPIE: Veiligheidssituatie in Amhara*, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>193</sup> Addis Standard, *News: Dozens of schools in East Gojjam Zone of Amhara region reopen after six-month delay*, 13 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>194</sup> OHCHR, *Ethiopia: Violence in Amhara region*, 17 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>195</sup> Project HOPE, *Ethiopia: Health System Has Collapsed in Conflict-Affected Areas*, 5 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>196</sup> Addis Standard, *News: Unrest fuels health emergency in the Amhara region, spurs a surge in communicable and non-communicable diseases*, 30 December 2023, [url](#); Addis Standard, *News: Following cholera outbreak in Bati district, Amhara health authorities take action to contain the spread of the disease*, 27 April 2024 [url](#); Project HOPE, *Ethiopia: Health System Has Collapsed in Conflict-Affected Areas*, 5 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>197</sup> Addis Standard, *News: Unrest fuels health emergency in the Amhara region, spurs a surge in communicable and non-communicable diseases*, 30 December 2023, [url](#)

## 5. Security situation - Tigray

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This section covers the situation in Tigray since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in November 2022, including the humanitarian and security situation.

### 5.1. Background of the conflict in Tigray

Tigray is Ethiopia's most northerly region, bordering Eritrea to the north, Sudan to the west, and Ethiopia's regional states of Afar and Amhara to the east and south respectively. Prior to the conflict, Tigray region was home to almost 6 million people, the majority of them Ethnic Tigrayan, although the region is also home to other ethnic communities, including the Irob and Kunama who live close to the Eritrean border.<sup>198</sup>

On 2 November 2022, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian federal authorities signed a ceasefire agreement, officially called Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA), in Pretoria, South Africa, mediated by the African Union (AU).<sup>199</sup> This marked the official end of a two-year conflict between the TPLF and the Ethiopian federal authorities. In the agreement, the signatories agreed to protect the civilian population and allow humanitarian access to Tigray. Furthermore, the TPLF consented that the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) would give up its heavy armaments, disarms and reintegrate into the federal defence structures or civilian life. On the other hand, the agreement stated that foreign and federal troops should withdraw from Tigray.<sup>200</sup> It should be noted that the agreement was not signed by the other stakeholders in the conflict in Tigray, namely the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), as well as armed groups from Amhara and Afar.<sup>201</sup>

DIS has previously reported on the conflict in Tigray and its consequences throughout Ethiopia in [DIS, Ethiopia: An update on the security and human rights situation since February 2022](#), [DIS, Etiopien: Sikkerhedssituationen](#) and [DIS, Ethiopia: Political opposition parties – recent developments](#)

The ceasefire agreement between the TPLF and the Ethiopian federal authorities has been upheld by the signatories.<sup>202</sup> However, the Eritrean and Amhara forces have yet to withdraw their troops from Tigray, and there have been reports of pockets of violent clashes in Tigray

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<sup>198</sup> HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>199</sup> African Union, *Agreement for lasting peace through a permanent cessation of hostilities between the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front*, 2 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>200</sup> African Union, *Agreement for lasting peace through a permanent cessation of hostilities between the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front*, 2 November 2023, [url](#), pp. 2-5

<sup>201</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>202</sup> Der Spiegel, *Tigray: A Fragile Peace in the Wake of Unspeakable Horrors*, 5 April 2023 [url](#); Refugees International, *Scars of war and Deprivation: An Urgent Call to Reverse Tigray's Humanitarian Crisis*, March 2024, [url](#), p. 10

since November 2022.<sup>203</sup> Both Eritrea and Amhara have historically laid claim to parts of Tigray, and there is evidence of serious security incidents between Amhara and Tigray forces and EDF and Tigray forces.<sup>204</sup>

According to Martin Plaut, journalist and long-time observer of Ethiopia, the CoHA did not deliver sustainable peace, as it did not resolve the land disputes on Western and Southern Tigray.<sup>205</sup> EHRCO agreed and elaborated that the peace agreement had failed to deliver on dialogue and reconciliation processes, leaving the civilian population scarred by the conflict and wanting revenge.<sup>206</sup>

## 5.2. Actors in the conflict

### 5.2.1. Amhara militias

Since November 2022, there have been reports of sporadic fighting between Amhara and Tigray forces in the Southern, Western and North Western zones of Tigray<sup>207</sup> – two zones that Amhara claims as their territory.<sup>208</sup> These disputed territories are officially part of Tigray but have been *de facto* under Amhara control since November 2020. The Federal government has stated that a referendum should resolve the question of these disputed territories.<sup>209</sup>

During the course of the two-year conflict in Tigray, there has been many reports of as many as 1.2 million Tigrayans being expelled from their homes in Western Tigray, notably by the Amhara militia, Fano.<sup>210</sup> According to the UN Human Rights Council, the Fano militia continued to evict and even kill Tigrayan civilians in Western Tigray after the signing of the ceasefire agreement, although to a lesser extent than in previous years.<sup>211</sup> For more on Fano and the security situation in Amhara, please refer to Chapter 4: [Security situation in Amhara](#).

<sup>203</sup> Addis Standard, *News: Deadly clash in South Tigray Zone as Amhara, Tigray regions accuse each other of provocation*, 28 March, 2024, [url](#); RFI, *Éthiopie: six mois après l'accord de paix au Tigré, d'importants défis persistent*, 2 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>204</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 26; Sweden, *Migrationsverket, Etiopien: Säkerhet och efterkrigscontext i Tigray (version 1.1)*, 10 July 2023, [url](#), p. 26; ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update | February 2024 Clashes in Tigray's Disputed Territories Threaten Peace Deal*, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>205</sup> Martin Plaut: 1

<sup>206</sup> EHRCO: 22-24

<sup>207</sup> In Amhara, the disputed territories are referred to as follows: Western Tigray are referred to as Welkait, Tsegede, and Humera woredas, North-Western Tigray as Tselemt woreda and Southern Tigray as Raya-Azebo and Alamata woredas, ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update | February 2024 Clashes in Tigray's Disputed Territories Threaten Peace Deal*, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>208</sup> Sweden, *Migrationsverket, Etiopien: Säkerhet och efterkrigscontext i Tigray (version 1.1)*, 10 July 2023, [url](#), p. 26; ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update | February 2024 Clashes in Tigray's Disputed Territories Threaten Peace Deal*, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>209</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO October 2023 Monthly Update: Ethiopia's International Relations*, 22 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>210</sup> HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>211</sup> Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, [url](#), p. 8; HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 45

### 5.2.2. Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF)

Months after signing the CoHA in November 2022, EDF troops withdrew from most of Tigray. However, EDF retained control of parts of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border region. Some of the areas where Eritrea remained present had already been a source of disagreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea since the 1998 war.<sup>212</sup>

Eritrean forces have committed a series of crimes against civilians in Tigray since the signing of the CoHA.<sup>213</sup> Documented incidents include the targeted killings of civilians. For instance, on 17 November 2022, Eritrean soldiers reportedly shot and killed four young civilians in Axum, Central Tigray.<sup>214</sup> Subsequent reports from 19 November 2022 stated that Eritrean forces were responsible for the deaths of 63 civilians, including 10 children.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, there have been different instances of looting and mass detentions by Eritrean forces, particularly noted in the looting of shops and vehicles towards the end of November 2022.<sup>216</sup> Adding to the violence are sexual assaults, which have continued unabated despite the peace agreements.<sup>217</sup> Reports from February 2023 indicate ongoing sexual violence, with survivors having to flee significant distances to avoid Eritrean roadblocks and seek medical assistance.<sup>218</sup>

## 5.3. Conflict dynamics and types of violence

As stated above, sexual and gender based violence has remained pervasive in Tigray even after the signing of the CoHA. The ICHREE documented numerous instances of rape and sexual violence by both EDF and Amhara forces after November 2022.<sup>219</sup> Amnesty International highlighted severe cases of sexual violence, including gang rapes and sexual slavery committed by Eritrean forces. One medical center in Eastern Tigray reported 76 new cases of sexual and gender based violence within a single week in June 2023.<sup>220</sup> Additionally, the Organization for Justice and Accountability in the Horn of Africa found that out of 305 medical records reviewed, 128 incidents of sexual and gender based violence occurred after November 2022,

<sup>212</sup> The Economist, *Ethiopia's prime minister wants a Red Sea harbour*, 2 November 2023, [url](#); Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, [url](#), pp. 13-14; HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), pp.45-46; The Reporter Ethiopia, *Eritrean forces still occupy several woredas and kebeles in Tigray, officials*, 22 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>213</sup> Addis Standard, *News: Tigrayan official accuses Eritrean forces of "summarily executing" civilians, calls on federal government for protection*, 28 November 2022, [url](#); Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, [url](#), pp. 8-9; ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update November 2022*, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>214</sup> Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>215</sup> VOA, *Kidnappings, Looting Cited in Ethiopia's Tigray After Truce*, 27 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>216</sup> AP, *Kidnappings, looting cited in Ethiopia's Tigray after truce*, 27 November 2022, [url](#); ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update November 2022*, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>217</sup> BBC, *Ethiopia war in Tigray: Eritrean soldiers accused of rape despite peace deal*, 15 February 2023, [url](#); The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopian minorities remain fearful despite peace deal*, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>218</sup> The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopian minorities remain fearful despite peace deal*, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> USDOS, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>220</sup> Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: "Today or tomorrow, they should be brought before justice": Rape, sexual slavery, extrajudicial executions, and pillage by Eritrean Defence Forces*, 4 September 2023, [url](#)

primarily in areas with EDF presence, indicating that the pattern of sexual violence in Tigray had not abated.<sup>221</sup> The weaponisation of sexual and gender based violence in Tigray has previously been described in [DIS, Ethiopia: An update on the security and human rights situation since February 2022](#).<sup>222</sup>

After the CoHA, forced displacement of Tigrayan civilians by Amhara forces continued. The authorities detained and expelled more than a thousand Tigrayans from Western Tigray in November 2022 and January 2023. By March 2024, nearly 60 000 displaced individuals had sought refuge in IDP shelters near Shire.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, abductions by Eritrean forces have been frequent post-CoHA. In February 2023, 10 youngsters were abducted from Gure Endagabir near Axum.<sup>224</sup> By April 2024, there were 93 reported abductions in Gulomkeda and Irob woredas. These acts have often been coupled with looting, including the theft of livestock.<sup>225</sup>

Eritrean forces have committed a series of crimes against civilians in Tigray since the signing of the CoHA.<sup>226</sup> Documented incidents include the targeted killings of civilians. For instance, on November 17 2022, Eritrean soldiers reportedly shot and killed four young civilians in Axum, Central Tigray.<sup>227</sup> Subsequent reports from 19 November 2022 stated that Eritrean forces were responsible for the deaths of 63 civilians, including 10 children.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, there have been different instances of looting and mass detentions by Eritrean forces, particularly noted in the looting of shops and vehicles towards the end of November 2022.<sup>229</sup> Reports from February 2023 indicate that sexual violence against women have continued since the peace agreements, while survivors in need of medical assistance have had to flee significant distances to avoid Eritrean roadblocks.<sup>230</sup>

In February 2024, fighting between local forces from Amhara and Tigray erupted in Southern Tigray. This was the first recorded armed clashes in this part of Tigray since the wider conflict ended in November 2022. According to ACLED's Ethiopia Peace Observatory, this indicated that

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<sup>221</sup> Organization for Justice and Accountability in the Horn of Africa, *Broken Promises Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Before and After the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Tigray, Ethiopia*, August 2023, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>222</sup> DIS, *Ethiopia: An update on the security and human rights situation since February 2022*, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 14-15

<sup>223</sup> HRW, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Cleansing Persists Under Tigray Truce*, 1 June 2023, [url](#); The Reporter, *No way home for more than 3 million IDPs withering in camps*, 30 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>224</sup> Addis Standard, *News: AU monitoring team conducts second visit in predominantly Eritrea-controlled Gulemekeda district, Zalambessa town*, 6 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>225</sup> AP, *Eritrean troops are accused of abducting farmers and stealing livestock in Ethiopia's Tigray*, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>226</sup> Addis Standard, *News: Tigrayan official accuses Eritrean forces of "summarily executing" civilians, calls on federal government for protection*, 28 November 2022, [url](#); Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, [url](#), pp. 8-9; ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update November 2022*, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>227</sup> Ethiopia Watch, *Civil society Monitoring of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement*, July 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>228</sup> VOA, *Kidnappings, Looting Cited in Ethiopia's Tigray After Truce*, 27 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>229</sup> AP, *Kidnappings, looting cited in Ethiopia's Tigray after truce*, 27 November 2022, [url](#); ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update November 2022*, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>230</sup> The New Humanitarian, *Ethiopian minorities remain fearful despite peace deal*, 16 February 2023, [url](#)



the Tigrayan forces had not disarmed as stated in the ceasefire agreement.<sup>231</sup> The fighting in Southern Tigray between Amhara and Tigray militias continued in March and April 2024 and tensions over the disputed territories between the Amhara and Tigray regional governments increased as the ENDF also clashed with Amhara militias.<sup>232</sup> Because of the renewed fighting in Tigray, protesters in Western and Southern Tigray have demanded that the Ethiopian federal authorities resolve the territorial disputes.<sup>233</sup>

## 5.4. Humanitarian situation

According to the UN Human Rights Council, the dire humanitarian situation in Tigray improved ‘significantly’ after the involved parties signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in November 2022. Following the signing, authorities allowed humanitarian access into some, but not all, areas of Tigray.<sup>234</sup> Tigray had suffered from acute food shortages during the war, with famine-like situations in at least 12 districts. After the war, locust infections and ongoing drought in the Horn of Africa aggravated the food crisis. According to the Interim Regional Administrator of Tigray, about 2 million persons were at risk of starvation and additional 5.2 needed food aid by the end of 2023.<sup>235</sup>

The largest provider of food aid to Ethiopia is USAID but when the agency discovered cases of theft and resale of food donations, USAID announced that they suspended their food aid to Tigray by June 2023.<sup>236</sup> Some sources indicated that in reality the suspension of food aid by USAID occurred in the Northern regions of Tigray as early as March 2023.<sup>237</sup> In addition, the World Food Programme (WFP) discovered that there had been diversions in their food donation to Tigray and reacted by suspending their donations even though Tigray was in a state of food shortage.<sup>238</sup> The diversion of food aid has been described as ‘widespread and coordinated’.<sup>239</sup> The distribution of food aid has restarted in Tigray by December 2023.<sup>240</sup> However, the installment of a new anti-theft system as well as lack of funding means that not everybody at risk of famine have received food assistance.<sup>241</sup>

<sup>231</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update | February 2024 Clashes in Tigray’s Disputed Territories Threaten Peace Deal*, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>232</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO Weekly Update (2 April 2024)*, 3 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>233</sup> ACLED EPO, *EPO Monthly Update | February 2024 Clashes in Tigray’s Disputed Territories Threaten Peace Deal*, 19 March 2024, [url](#); ACLED EPO, *EPO Weekly Update (2 April 2024)*, 3 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>234</sup> HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 60

<sup>235</sup> DW, *Ethiopia's Tigray region ravaged by deadly famine*, 12/12/2023, [url](#)

<sup>236</sup> USAID, *Pause of U.S. Food Aid in Tigray, Ethiopia*, Statement by Administrator Samantha Power, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>237</sup> New Humanitarian, *USAID suspends all food aid to Ethiopia over massive diversion scheme: reports*, 8 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>238</sup> Martin Plaut: 6

<sup>239</sup> New Humanitarian, *Aid glitches and funding shortfalls increase famine fears in Tigray*, 13 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>240</sup> TGHAT, *Food aid restarts in Tigray with a reduced target*, 30 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>241</sup> New Humanitarian, *Aid glitches and funding shortfalls increase famine fears in Tigray*, 13 February 2023, [url](#); Martin Plaut: 6

On the issue of humanitarian aid in Tigray, Martin Plaut opines in May 2024 that there is no clear evidence of the Ethiopian government being involved, in or responsible for, preventing humanitarian aid from reaching Tigray.<sup>242</sup> The National Disaster Risk Management Commission, of the federal government, claims that there are ‘intents of politisation’ of humanitarian aid defining the situation as ‘a drought rather than a famine’.<sup>243</sup> Despite this, authorities have not fully restored humanitarian access and humanitarian organisations do not have access to all areas of Tigray.<sup>244</sup>

The war in Tigray has drastically reduced access to medical care. Before the conflict, the region had over 1 000 health facilities and a large health care workforce.<sup>245</sup> The war resulted in severe damage and looting of 81 % of health posts, 74 % of health centers, and 86 % of hospitals, and many facilities only being partially functional due to shortages in supplies and equipment.<sup>246</sup> Medicine shortages, insufficient health professionals, and budget constraints have further hindered healthcare, forcing hospitals to charge fees that many cannot afford.<sup>247</sup> The disruption has also increased the risk of disease outbreaks and led to a fivefold rise in maternal mortality.<sup>248</sup>

According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), education in Tigray is hindered by damaged infrastructure, teacher shortages, lack of materials, financial constraints and security issues. Despite a reported resumption in May 2023, nearly 400 schools in Western, Southern, and North Western Tigray remain inaccessible. Education resumed in parts of Southern Tigray under Amhara control in December 2022.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Martin Plaut: 9

<sup>243</sup> ENA, *Nat’l Disaster Risk Commission Criticizes Elements Trying to Politicize Drought in Ethiopia*, 4 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>244</sup> HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>245</sup> UNICEF, World Food Programme et. Al, *Meher Assessment Report conducted from 18 Nov-8 December, 2023, Tigray Region – Ethiopia*, December 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>246</sup> Addis Standard, News: *Two-year war leaves 86% of Tigray’s healthcare facilities devastated: new report*, 5 October 2023, [url](#); UNICEF, World Food Programme et. Al, *Meher Assessment Report conducted from 18 Nov-8 December, 2023, Tigray Region – Ethiopia*, December 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>247</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Mekelle: A city under a lingering siege (Part 2)*, 17 August 2023, [url](#); EHRC, *Human Rights Monitoring Report on Tigray*, February 2024, [url](#), pp. 18-20

<sup>248</sup> CARE, *Fighting for maternal health in Ethiopia with two sticks and fertilizer sacks*, 15 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>249</sup> EHRC, *Human Rights Monitoring Report on Tigray*, February 2024, [url](#), pp. 21-23



## 6. Security situation – Oromia

### 6.1. Background of the conflict in Oromia

Oromia is the largest of Ethiopia's regions, home to an estimated 35 million people, more than 90 % living in rural areas.<sup>250</sup>

In July 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed removed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) from the national terrorist list and formally recognised the organisation as a political party in Ethiopia. In return, the OLF leadership agreed to disarm.<sup>251</sup> However, parts of the OLF did not wish to disarm and broke out to form the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), who broke ties with the OLF and launched an insurgency against the federal authorities October 2018.<sup>252</sup>

The federal authorities instituted a *de facto* state of emergency, granting themselves extensive powers, including the imposition of a curfew, a ban on gatherings, and arbitrary detentions.<sup>253</sup>

### 6.2. Actors in the conflict

The conflict in Western Oromia consists of a myriad of armed groups on both sides of the conflict. The federal authorities are present through both the ENDF and regional police.<sup>254</sup> Non-state armed actors in Oromia include the OLA<sup>255</sup> as well as OLA splinter groups, local Oromo militias, and ethnic militias from the neighbouring regional states of Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz, as well as armed civilian groups often consisting of local farmers and youths.<sup>256</sup>

The broad fault lines of the conflict lie between the OLA, Amhara militias, and federal authorities in a struggle for territorial and administrative control over parts of the region, with different views on the Ethiopian federation.<sup>257</sup> An international researcher stated that it is often difficult to determine which actors are involved in violent incidents because of the very limited

<sup>250</sup> HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 60

<sup>251</sup> Salemot, Marew Ababe, *Why did peace talks fail in Ethiopia with the Oromo Liberation Front?*, 4 January 2024, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 11; USDOS, *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>252</sup> International researcher: 7; Salemot, Marew Ababe, *Why did peace talks fail in Ethiopia with the Oromo Liberation Front?*, 4 January 2024, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 1; HRC, *Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations (A/HRC/54/CRP.3)*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 16; Belgium, CEDOCA, *COI FOCUS, ETHIOPIE: Veiligheidssituatie in Oromia*, 26 March 2024, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>253</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, *COI FOCUS, ETHIOPIE: Veiligheidssituatie in Oromia*, 26 March 2024, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>254</sup> Rift Valley Institute, *CONFLICT TREND ANALYSIS WESTERN OROMIA*, March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>255</sup> The federal authorities refers to the OLA as OLF-Shene, Rift Valley Institute, *CONFLICT TREND ANALYSIS WESTERN OROMIA*, March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>256</sup> Rift Valley Institute, *CONFLICT TREND ANALYSIS WESTERN OROMIA*, March 2023, [url](#), p. 6; Belgium, CEDOCA, *COI FOCUS, ETHIOPIE: Veiligheidssituatie in Oromia*, 26 March 2024, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>257</sup> Rift Valley Institute, *CONFLICT TREND ANALYSIS WESTERN OROMIA*, March 2023, [url](#), p. 2; Belgium, CEDOCA, *COI FOCUS, ETHIOPIE: Veiligheidssituatie in Oromia*, 26 March 2024, [url](#), p. 11

flow of information from the conflict zones. This leads to conflicting statements about who committed a given violent incident, leaving it unclear who is responsible.<sup>258</sup>

The Ethiopian Peace Observatory (EPO) noted that the actors involved in the conflict have undergone several changes. Before the peace negotiations in spring of 2023, the Oromia Special Forces (OSF) were the main force involved in the fight against the OLA. In early April 2023, the Ethiopian federal authorities announced the disbanding of all regional special forces. A few days later, the ENDF announced that the federal police had taken over security tasks in Oromia.<sup>259</sup>

### 6.3. Conflict dynamics and types of violence

The security situation in Oromia varies across the region.<sup>260</sup> Around the turn of the year 2022, hostilities between the OLA and federal authorities escalated in the four Wollega zones, Guji, Borana, and parts of West Shewa.<sup>261</sup> At the same time, Fano became increasingly active in the border area between Amhara and Oromia.<sup>262</sup> All parties involved in the violence have been targeting civilians throughout the duration of the conflict.<sup>263</sup>

In spring of 2023, peace talks took place between the federal authorities and the OLA in Zanzibar, Tanzania. The negotiators parted ways without results, despite the OLA indicating holding the talks in a constructive atmosphere. The interviewed international researcher noted that it is unclear as to whether a deal between the negotiating parties would even put an end to the conflict because many actors in the conflict have become financially dependent on the continuation of violence. Furthermore, it is unclear to the researcher whether the negotiating team from the OLA enjoys any legitimacy amongst the fighters on the ground.<sup>264</sup> After the talks broke down, the government launched a new offensive in Oromia, after which violence in the region sharply increased again.<sup>265</sup>

Over the course of the conflict, the armed groups have also intensified their attacks against civilians. In western Oromia, armed groups, mainly the OLA and Fano militias, carry out attacks on both Oromo and Amhara civilians.<sup>266</sup> Furthermore, Landinfo stated that there has been increasing tensions between ethnic Oromos and ethnic Amharas in the region in recent years.<sup>267</sup> Since July 2023, the number of kidnappings for ransom has also increased in

<sup>258</sup> International researcher: 2, 5, 18

<sup>259</sup> ALCED EPO, *EPO November 2023 Monthly: An Evolving Conflict Environment in Oromia*, 14 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>260</sup> International researcher: 4

<sup>261</sup> HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, [url](#), p. 4; International Crisis Group, *Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Africa: Ethiopia*, April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>262</sup> International Crisis Group, *Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Africa: Ethiopia*, April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>263</sup> International researcher: 5; International Crisis Group, *Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Africa: Ethiopia*, April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>264</sup> International researcher: 7; HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>265</sup> HRC, *Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia*, 14 September 2023, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>266</sup> ALCED EPO, *EPO August 2023 Monthly: Conflict in Amhara Region*, 8 September 2023, [url](#); EHRCO: 15; EHRC: 38

<sup>267</sup> Landinfo, *Temanotat Etiopia: Væpnet konflikt og politisk opposisjon i Oromia*, 24. februar 2023, [url](#), p. 15

Oromia.<sup>268</sup> According to the international researcher, the conflict has been going on for so long that many have become financially dependent on the conflict as a source of income, blurring the lines in Oromia between politically motivated armed struggle and financially motivated criminal activity, such as kidnappings for ransom.<sup>269</sup>

In November 2023, the OLA and representatives of the Ethiopian government met again in Tanzania for a second round of peace talks. Violence decreased significantly during the talks. Again, the talks broke down and violence escalated immediately after the failed negotiations, resulting in civilian deaths.<sup>270</sup> Meanwhile, tensions between the Oromo and Amhara also lead to more attacks on civilians.<sup>271</sup>

The Oromia insurgency continued with clashes between government forces and the OLA. On 12 January 2024, a drone strike by federal forces in Horo Guduru Wollega Zone killed four people. Later, on 28 January, the OLA declared a twenty-day ban on transport and businesses. In late January and February, counterinsurgency operations resulted in the deaths of over 120 OLA members, including leaders, according to Crisis Group. The authorities briefly detained a French journalist in February for alleged conspiracy with the OLA. On 4 March 2024, the OLA gained ground in Gelana district, prompting the government to redeploy troops to the Amhara region. On 4 April, the OLA reportedly killed twelve Amhara civilians in West Shewa, and government forces killed twenty civilians in South West Shewa, accusing them of links to the OLA. The government also attempted to weaken the OLA by calling for fighters to surrender, exploiting leadership divisions, and training local militias.<sup>272</sup>

## 6.4. Humanitarian situation

In Oromia, violence and the destruction of existing infrastructure over the past years affect the local population's access to essential services such as education, health care, water and sanitation negatively.<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, ongoing severe drought affect the humanitarian situation in the southern and western parts of Oromia.<sup>274</sup> Humanitarian organisations face serious challenges in reaching people in need.<sup>275</sup> According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), food supply for vulnerable persons and those

<sup>268</sup> EHRCO: 15; EHRC: 38; international researcher: 5, 7

<sup>269</sup> International researcher: 5, 7.

<sup>270</sup> Addis Standard, *News: 45 believers killed in two separate attacks in Arsi and Kellem Wollega zones, Oromia region*, 1 December 2023, [url](#); ALCED EPO, *EPO November 2023 Monthly: An Evolving Conflict Environment in Oromia*, 14 December 2023, [url](#);

<sup>271</sup> International Crisis Group, *Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Africa: Ethiopia*, April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>272</sup> International Crisis Group, *Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Africa: Ethiopia*, April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>273</sup> EHRC: 37; SIDA, *Humanitarian Crisis Analysis – Ethiopia*, 31 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 2-4; OCHA, Ethiopia: Access Snapshot, Oromia region (south-west) (As of 31 October 2022), 9 November 2022, [url](#); OCHA, ETHIOPIA: Situation Report - Last updated: 10 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>274</sup> SIDA, *Humanitarian Crisis Analysis – Ethiopia*, 31 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 2-4; OCHA, ETHIOPIA: Situation Report - Last updated: 10 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>275</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA: National Access map*, 31 May 2024, [url](#); EHRC: 37; SIDA, *Humanitarian Crisis Analysis – Ethiopia*, 31 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 2-4; OCHA, Ethiopia: Access Snapshot, Oromia region (south-west) (As of 31 October 2022), 9 November 2022, [url](#); OCHA, ETHIOPIA: Situation Report - Last updated: 10 June 2024, [url](#)

## ETHIOPIA: SECURITY SITUATION AND RETURN

affected by the ongoing conflict remains inadequate and is hindered by insecurity and logistical problems against the backdrop of increasing malnutrition rates.<sup>276</sup> Additionally, the EHRC stated that the presence of armed groups in Oromia prevents farmers from farming the land.<sup>277</sup> CEDOCA cites a report from the European Institute of Peace from 2022, and notes that government troops had ordered local farmers in Oromia not to sow crops as this could provide cover for OLA troops.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> OCHA, *Ethiopia: Access Snapshot, Oromia region (south-west) (As of 31 October 2022)*, 9 November 2022, [url](#);

<sup>277</sup> EHRC: 37

<sup>278</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, *ETHIOPIE: Veiligheidssituatie in Oromia*, 26 March 2024, [url](#), p. 25

## 7. Treatment of perceived political opponents and ethnic groups in light of the conflicts

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### 7.1. Oromia

According to the EHRC, one defining trait of the conflict in Oromia is the high degree of armed groups committing crimes, attacking civilians, officials and civil servants as well as revenge and retaliation attacks.<sup>279</sup> The EHRC further elaborated that Oromia is the region with the highest number of arrested and detained people who are suspected by the security forces of supporting or being affiliated with the armed opposition groups.<sup>280</sup>

In most cases, detained people have been denied access to fair trial and justice systems. The authorities have established informal detention centres as there are too few formal detention centres compared to the high number of detained persons.<sup>281</sup>

According to a human rights organisation, a high number of detentions across Ethiopia occur in Oromia as the conflict has been going on for the past 4 to 5 years, compared to the more recently escalating conflict in Amhara.<sup>282</sup> This section describes the extent of the targeting of perceived political opponents, including the civilian population in Oromia in light of the current conflict.

#### 7.1.1. Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)

The OLA is currently the only group left on the Ethiopian list of terrorist organisations.<sup>283</sup> It is difficult to assess the scale of the federal authorities' targeting of persons affiliated with the OLA due to the limited flow of information from the conflict zones in Oromia. However, it is clear to one of the interviewed researchers that the authorities imprison many OLA affiliates and subject many to torture while incarcerated.<sup>284</sup> The researcher further added that the fact that the authorities officially define OLA as a terrorist organisation in Ethiopia means that the amount of evidence required to arrest alleged OLA members is very low. Any affiliation with the OLA at any level places the individual at risk of the federal authorities persecuting them.<sup>285</sup> The academic researcher interviewed for this report stated that if a person is perceived to be affiliated with the OLA, e.g. via posts on social media suggesting that the person supports the resistance, he runs a high risk of being detained. The federal police fired the State Minister of

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<sup>279</sup> EHRC: 38

<sup>280</sup> EHRC: 40

<sup>281</sup> EHRC: 41

<sup>282</sup> EHRC: 42

<sup>283</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 53

<sup>284</sup> International researcher: 18

<sup>285</sup> International researcher: 19; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 53

Peace, Taye Dendea, on accusations of conspiring with the OLA. He was a member of the Prosperity Party, but rumours against him led to his arrest.<sup>286</sup>

On the other hand, an academic researcher consulted in Addis Ababa for this report opined that the government treated the OLA members ‘with fear and respect’ because of its military force. As an example of this, the government invited the OLA leadership to sit at the negotiations held in Tanzania late 2023.<sup>287</sup>

### *Family members of members of the OLA*

The two researchers agreed that family members of actual or alleged OLA members also risk maltreatment.<sup>288</sup> The international researcher assessed that the higher the position within the OLA – as well as the alleged position within the OLA – the higher the risk for the family members. To illustrate this point, the researcher highlighted that the authorities arrested the family members of a prominent OLF member, Bate Urgessa, a couple of days after his assassination. The authorities accused Urgessa of being a member of both the OLA and the OLF as well as being engaged in serious political opposition activities.<sup>289</sup>

By contrast, the international researcher assessed that there would be less risk of the federal forces arresting a low-level OLA fighter’s family.<sup>290</sup>

### *7.1.2. Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)*

In 2018, the authorities removed the OLF from the national terrorist list and formally integrated into the legal political architecture of Ethiopia.<sup>291</sup> Although the authorities now formally recognise OLF as a legal opposition party, all the interlocutors consulted on this topic agreed that there is a risk that the federal authorities will target OLF members and people affiliated with the OLF.<sup>292</sup>

According to the international researcher, the federal authorities has *de facto* ‘decapitated’ OLF, who cannot in reality function as an actual opposition party. As an example of this, they highlighted the assassination of prominent OLF member, Bate Urgessa, and the discovery of his body in the town of Meki on 10 April 2024, only a month after his release from prison.<sup>293</sup> The researcher stressed that it is unclear who was responsible for the assassination of Urgessa, and

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<sup>286</sup> Academic researcher: 6; AP, *Ethiopia arrests former peace minister over alleged links to an outlawed rebel group*, 13 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>287</sup> Research institution: 8

<sup>288</sup> International researcher: 18; Academic researcher: 7

<sup>289</sup> Borkena, *Ethiopia : Gov’t arrested family members of Battee Urgessa*, 12 April 2024, [url](#); International researcher: 20

<sup>290</sup> International researcher: 21

<sup>291</sup> Salemot, Marew Ababe, *Why did peace talks fail in Ethiopia with the Oromo Liberation Front?*, 4 January 2024, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>292</sup> Research institution: 1,2; International researcher: 8-9,11-13; Academic researcher: 1-5; Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia’s Deepening Crackdown on Dissent*, 4 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>293</sup> International researcher: 8; Research institution: 1,2; International researcher: 8-9,11-13; academic researcher: 1-5; Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia’s Deepening Crackdown on Dissent*, 4 March 2024, [url](#)

the uncertainty about the identity of the perpetrators contributed to a climate of fear within the political sphere in Ethiopia – even amongst government officials. The researcher described the targeting of political figures in the country as arbitrary to an extent that no one can predict who will be under attack next and for what reasons.<sup>294</sup> The academic researcher also pointed out the authorities placed the long-time chairperson of the OLF, Dawud Ibsa, under house arrest in 2021, only to release him in March 2022.<sup>295</sup>

Despite these high-profile cases of politically motivated targeting of OLF members, two sources consulted in Addis Ababa for this report agreed that low-ranking members of the OLF are more likely to be victims of assassinations and kidnapping compared to high-ranking members of the OLF.<sup>296</sup> It is associated with a higher risk for the perpetrator to target a well-known high-ranking official whereas low-ranking members are perceived to be without any form of protection and therefore easier targets.<sup>297</sup> A research institution interviewed for this report highlighted that for many ethnic Oromos, the OLF has remained a symbol of resistance, but the OLF does not constitute a cohesive unit. To a greater extent, it is a ‘societal form of resistance,’ so it is difficult to demarcate its members from members of the community. At the same time, as an organisation, the OLF is characterised by the presence of various factions and internal disputes. In various instances, its different sub-groups have operated as on a ‘franchise basis’ rather than as a centralised organisation.<sup>298</sup>

The EHRC stated that Oromia is the region with the highest number of arrests and detentions of people the authorities perceive to support or affiliate with the armed groups. The prolonged nature of the conflict compared to the conflict in Amhara explains in part the high number.<sup>299</sup>

There are no data to indicate whether politically motivated targeting of politicians in Ethiopia, including the members of the OLF, has increased or decreased in recent years.<sup>300</sup>

#### *Family members of OLF*

An academic researcher stated that if the family of OLF members talk about the violence that their spouses, siblings or children experience, or otherwise voice their opinion, the family itself is at risk.<sup>301</sup>

### *7.1.3. Perceived political opponents*

4 sources stated that it is difficult for both state and non-state actors to distinguish between friend and foe in the conflict.<sup>302</sup> As a result, Oromia has been marked by widespread levels of

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<sup>294</sup> International researcher: 10

<sup>295</sup> Academic researcher: 4; Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Opposition politician under house arrest: Dawud Ibsa*, 15 June 2021, [url](#); Africa News, *Ethiopia opposition leader released from house arrest*, 18 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>296</sup> International researcher: 13; academic researcher: 4

<sup>297</sup> International researcher: 13; academic researcher: 4

<sup>298</sup> Research institution: 2

<sup>299</sup> EHRC: 40; 42

<sup>300</sup> International researcher: 14

<sup>301</sup> Academic researcher: 9

<sup>302</sup> EHRC: 38, 39; research institution: 2; academic researcher: 8, 11; international researcher: 11



crimes and attacks against civilians by armed groups and government forces, while armed groups have attacked officials and civil servants. In this context revenge and retaliation attacks also occur.<sup>303</sup>

A research institution elaborated that civilians are at risk of being perceived as combatants. According to media reports and credible institutions, such as the EHRC, the federal government applies ‘a heavy-handed approach’ to anybody who is perceived to be a combatant. A heavy-handed approach in a warzone means that there are mass arrests, and detention of family members of persons who the authorities suspect of sympathising with or being members of the armed resistance. Western and Southern Oromia have higher levels of resistance, and are particularly hard hit. The more resistance, the more brutal the government’s response has been.<sup>304</sup> In December 2023, the authorities detained large numbers of young people and teachers in a house-to-house search in Addis Ababa ahead of a banned anti-war demonstration in the capital. The authorities accused some of the removal of Ethiopians flags from a school and of being members of the OLA.<sup>305</sup>

The OLA also uses similar tactics of attacking civilians perceived as government-supporters. OLA forces have killed more than 100 local officials in Oromia.<sup>306</sup> That has caused retaliation in a ‘tit-for-tat’ action. If the authorities perceive a person in one of the conflict zones in Oromia to be a supporter of the government, then OLA may target this person and their family as well.<sup>307</sup>

### *Targeting of OLF/OLA in Addis Ababa*

According to a research institution, Addis Ababa is not a conflict zone and Oromos who are vocal about their political opinions would be relatively safe in the capital, especially if they are not engaged in mobilising their ‘constituencies’ for the so-called unlawful activities. A person’s safety depends on how prominent this person is and how dangerous the government perceives the person to be. The authorities perceive some journalists as dangerous. As previously mentioned, if a person is perceived to be affiliated with the OLA, e.g. via suggestive social media posts, they will be detained. As an example of this, the research institution also pointed to the recent event where the State Minister of Peace was fired on accusations of conspiring with the OLA. He was a member of the Prosperity Party, but rumours against him led to his arrest.<sup>308</sup>

The academic researcher further elaborated that in a mixed neighbourhood in Addis Ababa, being a vocal supporter of the Oromo cause in itself would not put you at risk vis-à-vis your

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<sup>303</sup> EHRC: 38

<sup>304</sup> Research institution: 6

<sup>305</sup> Borkena, *Massive Crackdown in Addis Ababa Ahead of Planned Demonstration*, 6 December 2023, [url](#); Borkena, *Addis Ababa police say it has arrested 97 students, teachers*, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>306</sup> Research institution: 7

<sup>307</sup> Research institution: 7; The Guardian, *‘This is a pandemic’: Ethiopia’s Oromia region gripped by surge in kidnappings*, 23 January 2024, [url](#); EHRC: 39

<sup>308</sup> Research Institution: 8



neighbours. However, the authorities would perceive talking openly in favour of the OLA as very provocative.<sup>309</sup>

## 7.2. Tigray

Sources stated that the targeting of ethnic Tigrayans and people affiliated with the TPLF by the authorities has decreased significantly since the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in Tigray.<sup>310</sup> Based on the complaints received by Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), ethnic profiling and arbitrary detention or arrest of Tigrayans by authorities have diminished “to a minimum” since the peace agreement. The targeting seems to have shifted to other ethnic groups, namely the Amhara and Oromo population.<sup>311</sup>

The Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center further explained that since the signing of the CoHA, the authorities have released those Tigrayans previously subjected to mass arrests. Those released include several human rights defenders, journalists and researchers.<sup>312</sup> Shops, businesses and hotels owned by Tigrayans, which closed during the conflict, have reopened or resumed their activities.<sup>313</sup>

### 7.2.1. Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) members

After the signing of the CoHA in November 2022, the Ethiopian parliament voted to remove the TPLF from the list of terrorist organisations in Ethiopia.<sup>314</sup> However, the National Election Board of Ethiopia has not yet allowed the TPLF to register as a regional party in Ethiopia.<sup>315</sup>

Based on complaints received by the EHRC, there are no indications that the federal government target TPLF members as of May 2024.<sup>316</sup> The EHRC further pointed out that the interim government in Tigray consists of TPLF members who took part in the Tigray conflict, who attend meetings in Addis Ababa without facing troubles.<sup>317</sup>

Since the ceasefire in Tigray in November 2022, the federal government has allowed high profile TPLF officials to travel freely. However, the EHRDC opined that TPLF affiliates are still under surveillance. They further described the relationship between the federal authorities and the TPLF leader as imbued with mistrust; the Tigrayan interim administration has blamed the federal government for its failure to fulfil humanitarian needs in Tigray, and the federal

<sup>309</sup> Academic researcher: 5

<sup>310</sup> Sweden, Migrationsverket, *Landinformation: Etiopien. Tigreaner och deras situation utanför Tigray*, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 26, 34; Norway, Landinfo, *Etiopia: Forhold for tigrayer i Addis Abeba*, 29 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2, 5; Belgium, CEDOCA, *ETHIOPIE De situatie van Tigreërs in Addis Abeba*, 23 June 2023, [url](#), p. 9; EHRC: 14; EHDRC: 1

<sup>311</sup> EHRC: 14

<sup>312</sup> EHDRC: 1

<sup>313</sup> EHDRC: 1

<sup>314</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, *ETHIOPIE De situatie van Tigreërs in Addis Abeba*, 23 June 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>315</sup> Addis Standard, *#ASDailyScoop: Court upholds NEBE ruling declining request to establish TPLF as new regional party*, 7 August 2023, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>316</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 54; EHRC: 15

<sup>317</sup> EHRC: 15

government has blamed the TPLF for not respecting the peace agreement. Although there is an ongoing consultation between the two parties, there is still suspicion and tension.<sup>318</sup>

The EHRDC pointed out that the authorities keep persons who have travelled to or from Tigray at airports under intense surveillance. The authorities check their ID cards as well as the background of travellers, and have access to passenger lists. The authorities may not necessarily restrict persons from travelling to and from Tigray but will follow the person from a distance and monitor whom the person meets with as well as the purpose of the travel. The authorities mainly check high-profile TPLF-members and activists in Bole Airport. The level of surveillance depends on the political tension.<sup>319</sup>

### *7.2.2. Pro-government Tigrayans*

Freedom of movement is restricted for Tigrayans who were working with the federal government. They are currently still subject to surveillance and targeting by the TPLF. One of the interviewed organisations shared the case of a regional TV journalist, who had escaped to Addis Ababa out of fear for the TPLF, this person did not dare to move outside of Addis Ababa due to fear of being targeted by the TPLF.<sup>320</sup> In September 2023, the local government in Tigray arrested 15 members of the opposition for organising a demonstration against the TPLF and the interim government in Tigray.<sup>321</sup>

The EHRC did not have information about violations against Tigrayans residing in Addis Ababa.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> EHRDC: 3

<sup>319</sup> EHRDC: 4

<sup>320</sup> EHRDC: 1

<sup>321</sup> AfricaNews, *Ethiopia: 15 arrests in Tigray before a local opposition demonstration*, 6 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>322</sup> EHRC: 16

## 7.3. Amhara

### 7.3.1. Fano

The conflict in the Amhara region has led to severe maltreatment and human rights abuses against individuals associated with or perceived to be associated with the Fano movement. The Ethiopian government's crackdown on Fano has resulted in widespread violence, arbitrary detentions, and extrajudicial killings inside and outside the Amhara region.<sup>323</sup>

In the Amhara region, the federal government's indiscriminate labeling of all Amhara people as 'Fanos' has led to widespread targeting and persecution. This broad-brush approach means that the federal government considers anyone who opposes them a Fano representative. Practically, Fano has become a name for all Amhara armed resistance movements.<sup>324</sup> The federal government often detain individuals suspected of Fano affiliations without due process and subject them to torture.<sup>325</sup> The EHRCO further stated that attacks, the federal government carry out arrests and killings in Amhara based on suspicion and accusations of being a Fano member, support for the group or having family who the authorities perceive as members of Fano.<sup>326</sup>

### 7.3.2. Treatment of People with perceived or actual Fano Affiliation

Outside the Amhara region, particularly in Addis Ababa, the maltreatment of those associated with Fano continues through extensive surveillance, arbitrary detention, and ethnic profiling. The government employs various methods to suppress any perceived threats from the Amhara community.<sup>327</sup> On 12 April 2023, two male members of the Fano militia were shot dead in Addis Ababa as they tried to escape custody. The police suspected them of planning an attack.<sup>328</sup>

The international organisation interviewed for this report stated that Amharas in Addis Ababa are at risk of arbitrary detention by the security forces; there are reports of security forces showing up at night at the houses of ethnic Amhara people conducting searches in their houses. There are reports about ethnic profiling based on information about where people are from.<sup>329</sup> The EHDRC agreed and further elaborated that the authorities are conducting large-scale house searches in Addis Ababa. The checks are supposed to find or target people who support or affiliate with any of the armed groups. Based on reports, the authorities detain thousands of ethnic Amharas in Amhara and Addis Ababa for shorter or longer periods of time, suspecting them of supporting the Fano militias, in particular in August 2023 but also afterwards.<sup>330</sup> Along these lines, the academic researcher stated that the authorities demolish Amhara houses.<sup>331</sup> There are also evidence of the authorities wrongfully arresting patients in

<sup>323</sup> EHDRC: 9-10; Academic researcher: 11-13; international organisation: 12-16; EHRCO: 9-12; Mehari Maru: 5-8

<sup>324</sup> Mehari Maru: 7

<sup>325</sup> Academic researcher: 32-33; EHRCO: 9, 12, 16;

<sup>326</sup> EHCRO: 9

<sup>327</sup> International organisation: 23; EHRDC: 10; Mehari Meru: 2

<sup>328</sup> Germany, BAMF, *Länderreport 69 Äthiopien - Innenpolitische Lage*, 15 May 2024, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>329</sup> International organisation: 23

<sup>330</sup> EHRDC: 10

<sup>331</sup> Academic researcher: 24

medical facilities on the mere suspicion that they were Fano affiliates. In November 2023, in North Gonder Zone in Amhara, Ethiopian security forces entered and searched hospitals looking for wounded men that they suspected being Fano fighters or Fano affiliates.<sup>332</sup>

### *7.3.3. Treatment of Family Members of People Associated with Fano*

The Ethiopian government's crackdown on Fano extends to the families of those suspected of being members or supporters. Family members face various forms of persecution, including surveillance, harassment, and violence.<sup>333</sup>

### *7.3.4. General Treatment of Ethnic Amharas in Light of the Conflict in Amhara Region*

The conflict in the Amhara region has exacerbated the ethnic targeting of Amharas both within and outside the region, leading to widespread human rights abuses and a deteriorating humanitarian situation.<sup>334</sup> Furthermore, the academic researcher added that the authorities explicitly advise business owners in the private sector and managers in the public sector not to employ people of Amharic origin.<sup>335</sup>

Government forces have also attacked churches in the Amhara region: in May 2023, the national army attacked an orthodox church in Debre Elias District of the East Gojjam Zone in its search for members of the Fano militias. 95 % of the 600 persons in the church were either killed, injured or displaced. After that, those who were injured did not dare to seek medical treatment at the medical facilities where 200 ENDF soldier were receiving medical treatment after the attack.<sup>336</sup>

The government identify Amharas even though the government officially no longer use ethnicity as a category on ID cards. Any police officer or other official may ask a person where they are from, where they live or about their place of birth (city). When the police ask about their name, it will also be an indicator of ethnicity. Furthermore, when a person applies for renewal of ID card, the local authorities will reveal their ethnicity via their place of birth and their name. If a person happens to not have an ID card when asked by the police, their name will reveal their ethnicity.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> HRW, "If the Soldier Dies, It's on You" Attacks on Medical Care in Ethiopia's Amhara Conflict, July 2024, [url](#), pp. 25, 37

<sup>333</sup> Academic researcher: 24; EHRDC: 10

<sup>334</sup> EHDRC: 9-10; Academic researcher: 11-13; International organisation: 12-16; EHRDC: 9-12; Mehari Maru: 5-8

<sup>334</sup> Academic Researcher: 4; International organisation: 12-16; Mehari Maru: 7; EHRDC: 9-10; International organisation: 12-16

<sup>335</sup> Academic researcher: 24

<sup>336</sup> USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ethiopia, 30 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>337</sup> Academic researcher: 27, 28; International organisation: 24

## 7.4. Somali Region

### 7.4.1. *Treatment of Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)*

In October 2018, delegates of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and Ethiopian federal authorities signed a declaration of peace in the capital of Eritrea, Asmara, marking an end to years of armed conflict between the two parties.<sup>338</sup>

According to two sources, since the peace agreement and the subsequent absorption of the ONLF into the regional government, the ONLF now participates in the politics of the region, especially under the current leadership of the region.<sup>339</sup> Furthermore, the two sources elaborated that since 2019, the Somali region of Ethiopia has been one of the more stable regions in the country.<sup>340</sup> The international organisation noted that although Somali State has remained stable, the overall situation in the region is ‘fragile, but calm’.<sup>341</sup>

On the overall treatment of members of supporters of the ONLF, the research institution opined that there seems to be no large-scale prosecution based on individual membership of or affiliation with ONLF neither in the Somali Region, nor in Addis Ababa.<sup>342</sup> Similarly, the EHRC stated that they are not aware to what extent the federal government target or monitor ONLF supporters or members. The commission has noted incidents of interception and detention based on statements on social media.<sup>343</sup> The EHRC is not aware to what extent ethnic Somalis or supporters of the ONLF are targeted by authorities in Addis Ababa. However, the commission had come across one ethnic Somali person who had to flee to Somalia and who returned with the support of the EHRC.<sup>344</sup>

According to the research institution, the observed sharp decline in targeting of affiliates of the ONLF can be explained, in part, by the federal authorities’ two-fold approach in the Somali region. First, the government has been co-opting major opposition groups, which has contributed to the fragmentation of the regional political landscape, and second, the government has distributed and redistributed rents and resources among powerful groups in order to gain stability. Therefore, some of the ONLF leaders are now ‘in businesses’. On the other hand, there is a genuine feeling of ‘the periphery being centred’ as one researcher framed it with reference to the fact that some Somalis are now placed in important positions. An example of such a position held by a Somali is the vice-presidency of the Prosperity Party, which Adam Farah currently hold. To a large extent, there is a feeling among the Somalis of being reintegrated into the centre.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> FDRE & ONLF, *Joint Declaration between the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)*, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>339</sup> International organisation: 26; Research institution: 19

<sup>340</sup> International organisation: 26; Research institution: 19

<sup>341</sup> International organisation: 27

<sup>342</sup> Research institution: 20

<sup>343</sup> EHRC: 34

<sup>344</sup> EHRC: 34

<sup>345</sup> Research institution: 19

In March 2024, the federal authorities released former president of the Somali region, Abdi Mohamoud Omar, from prison. Omar previously oversaw command of the Liyu Police and the federal authorities convicted him of violations of human rights and inciting ethnic and religious conflict in the Somali region.<sup>346</sup>

On 18 September 2024, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) issued a statement voicing concern over actions taken by Ethiopian authorities in the Somali Region, which the group claims violate both constitutional rights and the 2018 peace agreement between the ONLF and the Ethiopian government.

The ONLF alleges that ‘Somali elders, women, and other community members have been paraded on television, coerced into humiliating themselves by denying their Somali identity.’<sup>347</sup>

### 7.4.2. Liyu Police

As part of the peace agreement of 2018, the Ethiopian federal authorities agreed to disband the paramilitary police force in the Somali region, known as Liyu Police.<sup>348</sup> However, three sources consulted in Addis Ababa for this report stated that although the Liyu Police has been dissolved on paper, the same security personnel remain in place in the region in other functions.<sup>349</sup>

The EHRC explained that they had received information from residents of the region that some of the persons who held positions during the previous government were still occupying government positions after the peace agreement and after the dissolution of the police. The commission opined that the change that happened after the peace agreement is a reform rather than a revolution. However, the federal government has stated that people should report if they know of any person who has committed serious human rights violations occupying official positions.<sup>350</sup>

The research institution stated that the circumstances surrounding the state of the Liyu police remains a puzzle.<sup>351</sup> The international organisation agreed and elaborated that it is uncertain to which extent the Liyu Police has been replaced by other special forces, fully absorbed into the regular forces, or if their name has simply been changed. According to this interviewed organisation, it seems as if the Liyu police has morphed into the existing police force and the prison guard, etc., and remain active in the fight against the al-Shabaab.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia Releases Ex-Politician Implicated in Heinous Crimes, 15 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>347</sup> Addis Standard, *News: ONLF accuses Ethiopian government of ‘violating constitutional rights’ and ‘breaching peace accord’*, 18 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>348</sup> Somali Dispatch, *Ethiopia: Somali Regional Government to Disband Liyu Police*, 11 April 2023, [url](#); International organisation: 27

<sup>349</sup> EHRC: 35; Research Institution: 21

<sup>350</sup> EHRC: 35

<sup>351</sup> Research Institution: 21

<sup>352</sup> International organisation: 27



## 8. Conditions upon return

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Information about the treatment of failed asylum seekers upon their return from Europe was scarce among the sources consulted in Addis Ababa, as the majority of those Ethiopians who return from Europe are migrants, not rejected asylum seekers.<sup>353</sup> A large number of Ethiopian migrants have returned from the Middle East region.<sup>354</sup>

### *Arrival and asylum procedures at Bole International Airport*

Bole International Airport is equipped with one of the most stable electricity connections in Ethiopia as the airport is critical infrastructure to the country. Therefore, Bole Airport has the capacity, including staff, to maintain and operate an electronic system in place to collect data about passengers who enter Ethiopia via the airport.<sup>355</sup>

The degree to which the Ethiopian federal authorities monitor arrivals to Ethiopia varies.<sup>356</sup> According to one source, a person who has been denied asylum in a foreign country would not automatically be of interest to the Ethiopian government upon their return. It is a general perception that seeking the opportunity abroad via migration is beneficial for the migrant, their family and the sending country.<sup>357</sup> However, one academic researcher opined that there still might be fear of maltreatment and negative attention among those who return. If the authorities perceive a person as affiliated with any opposition group, the authorities will not detain the person on arrival at Bole Airport unless it is a 'clearly known person'. However, the authorities will 'follow-up' at a later point. The follow-up will include questions about the person's identity, place of residence and cohabitants. This follow-up may be undertaken in an informal way by a uniformed police officer, rather than officially.<sup>358</sup>

The EHRC did not have any information on the extent to which Tigrayans returning from abroad are subject to monitoring or special procedures.<sup>359</sup>

Authorities used to have a list of Ethiopians, in particular of Tigrayans abroad who are under suspicion or government surveillance. However, most of those who fled to neighboring countries have returned. Previously, the EHRC used to receive complaints about Ethiopians/Tigrayans who the authorities denied leaving the country.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> An international organisation: 1

<sup>354</sup> An associate professor: 1

<sup>355</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 12

<sup>356</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 10

<sup>357</sup> An associate professor: 14

<sup>358</sup> An associate professor: 14

<sup>359</sup> EHRC: 19

<sup>360</sup> EHRC: 20



## 8.1. Registration of refugees and of returnees

From January to end of April 2024, approximately 4 000 Ethiopian refugees had returned, the majority from Sudan and a small minority from Yemen.<sup>361</sup>

The Refugee & Returnee Service (RSS) is the organisation that the Ethiopian government has legally mandated to register refugees and returnees with technical and financial support from the UNHCR.<sup>362</sup> The RSS replaces the Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) and is accountable to the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS).<sup>363</sup> Since March 2023, refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to register for and to have digital identification under the Ethiopia Digital Identification Proclamation No. 1284/2023.<sup>364</sup> In March 2024, the RSS began testing in Addis Ababa a new digital refugee ID card with a unique number. This system should prevent double registration but as of May 2024, the RSS has not scaled up the new system.<sup>365</sup> Before that, there had been a long suspension of registration and issuance of documents to refugees, beginning in November 2021 with the declaration of the State of Emergency. According to one international organisation, as many as 98 % of refugees did not have access to registration. Documentation service did only resume in Addis Ababa in 2023. In May 2024, an important caseload remained.<sup>366</sup> According to the UNHCR, the RSS has only conducted registration and recognition on *prima facie* basis of refugee status for people arriving from Laascanood in Somalia and from people from Sudan and non-Sudanese refugees who have left Sudan.<sup>367</sup> Unregistered refugees are particularly vulnerable to risks of denial of services, detention, onward movement including smuggling and trafficking.<sup>368</sup> According to one COI report, many asylum seekers have bought Ethiopian ID cards from corrupt Ethiopian officials in order to get valid documents.<sup>369</sup>

## 8.2. Persons who have committed a crime abroad

Information about the treatment of returnees who have committed a crime abroad and served their sentence abroad, is limited even among sources who follow the situation of migration in Ethiopia.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> An international organisation; UNHCR, *Regional Bureau for East, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes; Ethiopia Situation; Population of concern to UNHCR as of 30-Apr-24*, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>362</sup> RSS, *History of RSS*, n.d, [url](#); An international organisation: 7; an associate professor: 9

<sup>363</sup> UNHCR, *Country Summary as at 30 June 2023*, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>364</sup> FDRE, *Ethiopia Digital Identification Proclamation No. 1284/2023*, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>365</sup> An international organisation, UNHCR *Ethiopia launches inclusive ID system for refugees, boosts access to national services*, Press Release, 7 March 2024, [url](#); FDRE, *Digital Ethiopia 2025*, [url](#), p. 56

<sup>366</sup> An international organisation: 9

<sup>367</sup> UNHCR, *Country Summary as at 30 June 2023*, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>368</sup> An international organisation: 10

<sup>369</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 69

<sup>370</sup> An associate professor: 11

## 9. Migration and asylum in Ethiopia

### 9.1. Situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia

By April 2024, there were 172 645 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia.<sup>371</sup> The influx of Eritreans who have crossed the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia have continued during the war despite the fact that there have been Eritrean soldiers on both sides of the border.<sup>372</sup> Since January 2020, the automatic recognition of Eritreans as refugees has stopped.<sup>373</sup>

Around August 2023, Ethiopia had deported approximately 360 unregistered Eritreans and a few registered refugees by bus to Eritrea. There has been no direct information about their current situation in Eritrea to relevant organisations.<sup>374</sup> According to one source, Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia have ‘clear fear’ based on their nationality as the Ethiopian government sees them as threat.<sup>375</sup>

### 9.2. Migration out of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is the third-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa.<sup>376</sup> It remains a transit country for refugees (e.g. coming from Sudan), a destination country for other refugees and a sender country as well.<sup>377</sup> Lately, fewer refugees, especially Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali refugees, use the northern route from Ethiopia to Europe than before the conflict in Sudan.<sup>378</sup> After the ceasefire, observers have noted an influx of migrants with Tigrayan and Amhara ethnicity, both men and women, along the northern route to Yemen and Djibouti.<sup>379</sup> As of May 2024, approximately 111 000 persons have left Sudan for Ethiopia, this movement started in April 2023 when the war in Sudan broke out.<sup>380</sup>

### 9.3. People who return from Middle Eastern countries

The governments of Ethiopia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) signed a bilateral agreement in 2021 stating that over 100 000 migrants from Ethiopia should be deported from KSA via Addis Ababa International Airport starting from 30 March 2022.<sup>381</sup> In 2023, Ethiopia has

<sup>371</sup> UNHCR, *Regional Bureau for East, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes; Ethiopia Situation; Population of concern to UNHCR as of 30-Apr-24*, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>372</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 71

<sup>373</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 70

<sup>374</sup> An international organisation: 10

<sup>375</sup> An associate professor: 17

<sup>376</sup> An international organisation: UNHCR, *Country Summary as at 30 June 2023*, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>377</sup> An international organisation: 4

<sup>378</sup> An international organisation: 7; an international humanitarian organisation: 6

<sup>379</sup> EHR: 21

<sup>380</sup> Mixed Migration Center, *Routes, protection incidents and future intentions of people displaced by the Sudan war*, May 2024, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>381</sup> IOM, *Response Capacities Stretched with Hasty Return of 40,000 Ethiopian Migrants*, Press Release, 16 July 2021, [url](#); IOM, *Funding Needed to Assist Over 100,000 Ethiopian Migrants Returning from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, Press Release, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

received over 100 000 deportees; in 2024, it is estimated that 1 000 persons will arrive per day.<sup>382</sup> From 2017 up until 2024, it is estimated that more than 600 000 Ethiopian citizens have been forcefully deported by the KSA.<sup>383</sup> Between March 2022 and June 2023, the Saudi border guards have shot and killed ‘several hundreds’ Ethiopian migrants who tried to cross the border between Yemen and the KSA.<sup>384</sup> Irregular migration towards the KSA continued with about 180 000 Ethiopians who left for the Middle East from January to September 2023.<sup>385</sup>

The lists of returnees from the KSA are kept with different organisations like IOM, Peace Ministry and the RRS. The RSS register the deportees.<sup>386</sup>

The challenges related to the high number of deportations are both institutional and integrational. Institutional, because a new coordination mechanism has had to be created under the Ministry of Justice<sup>387</sup> and because funding to cover for the needs of humanitarian assistance is insufficient.<sup>388</sup> In terms of reintegration, people who return from the KSA or other countries in the Middle East have lived in ‘slavery-like’ situations for years and have passed through detentions centres where they have been subject to rough treatment. They need to recover psychologically and socially to become functional economically and to be able to sustain themselves.<sup>389</sup> The Ethiopian government receives assistance by international organisations in their efforts to reintegrate the returnees into their local communities through capacity building, but Ethiopia is a large country with many hard-to-reach rural communities. If the economic situation of the returnee is not dealt with properly, they are likely to re-migrate according to one source.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> An associate professor: 1, 4

<sup>383</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 73

<sup>384</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*They Fired on Us Like Rain*” *Saudi Arabian Mass Killings of Ethiopian Migrants at the Yemen-Saudi Border*, 21 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>385</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, 31 January 2024, [url](#), p. 74

<sup>386</sup> An associate professor: 9

<sup>387</sup> An associate professor: 3

<sup>388</sup> IOM, *Funding Needed to Assist Over 100,000 Ethiopian Migrants Returning from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, Press Release, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>389</sup> An associate professor: 6, 5

<sup>390</sup> An international humanitarian organisation: 4

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## Annex 1: Meeting Minutes

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### An associate professor

Addis Ababa, 14 May 2024

#### Conditions upon return

1. The majority of those who returned to Ethiopia from abroad are migrants from the Middle East region. Only very few of the returnees have been to Europe (not including regular visits from the diaspora). There have been deportations as well as Assisted Voluntary Returns (AVRs) from the Middle East. Since 2013 until present those who returned reached approximately 800 000 persons. In 2023, several thousand Ethiopian migrants were forcibly deported from Saudi Arabia following a bilateral agreement with the Ethiopian government (Over 100,000).
2. As a part of the bilateral agreement between the Ethiopian government and Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia has sent approximately 277 000 migrants recently.
3. The high volume of deportations has been a new institutional experience for the Ethiopian government, and a nation task force was set which was then elevated to a national counsel under which a national partnership coalition is set serving as a coordination mechanism for efforts by different entities like government sectors, NGOs, Civil Society and Media. The coalition is hosted at the Ministry of Justice.
4. As of 2024, about 1 000 Ethiopian migrants are deported every day from Saudi Arabia. The plan is to return 70 000 over the following months.
5. The challenges following these mass deportations are the reintegration in society of the returnees. They need to recover psychologically and socially to become functional economically and to be able to sustain themselves.

#### Differentiated expectations to migrants

6. People who return from Saudi Arabia or other countries in the Middle East have lived in slavery-like situations for years and have passed through detentions centres where they have been subject to rough treatment. The expectations from the community from those migrants are very limited, and 'relatively limited support' can help these migrants. By contrast, when people return from migration to Europe, people in Ethiopia expect that those migrants to have lived relatively well. When they return, they are perceived as failed migrants since they return even though they could have had difficult lives in Europe. Even being housed in an asylum center in Europe is considered a better condition than staying in Ethiopia. Returnees from Europe expect more in terms of reception conditions and post return support in Ethiopia. However, as there are only few people returning from Europe, the experience is limited. They are given a small lump sum for their reintegration, which will set them off for fending for themselves. But if they were brought together and given the support in group it could have enabled them open small businesses to improve their life.
7. Returnees from Europe often experience high levels of disappointment and frustration and may refuse to talk to anybody.

### **Monitoring of returnees by the authorities**

8. There are list of returnees from Saudi Arabia kept with different organisations like IOM, the Danish Refugee Council, Peace Ministry and refugee Returnee Service (RRS).
9. Refugees and Returnees Service (RSS) is in charge of the registration of the deportees, and IOM is in charge of those who are voluntarily returned. IOM's assistance includes psychosocial support, livelihood, and a small amount of money for returnee transport.
10. Return over land (deportations via bus) is limited, but existing, in particularly from Djibouti. Most deportations are executed via airplane. Most irregular migration is done by bus, car, on foot or by boat.

### **Persons who have convicted a crime abroad**

11. Information about the treatment of returnees who have committed a crime abroad, and served their sentence abroad, is limited. Interpol is likely to be a part of the process.

### **Members of the political opposition**

12. The Ethiopian authorities would 'keep an eye' on any returnee, who is a member of an opposition party, or who is suspected of being a member, upon their return. The authorities would know of any affiliation with the opposition, if the returnee has been vocal about their support to the opposition on social media. The authorities track social media accounts and the surveillance of people who participate in demonstrations abroad is being more 'tightened'. The government keeps a list and has recently requested the US government to hand over some Ethiopian citizens who are opposition leaders. There are several Ethiopian Diaspora in the US who were accused of having committed

an offence against the Ethiopian state. People may fear to return because of the current 'ethnic mess'. Related to the ethnic policies mostly people from Tigray, Amhara or Oromia would be labeled as 'opposition' at different regimes and even in a single regime.

13. Currently, there is 'a lot' of ethnic targeting by the state in Addis Ababa, on people from Amhara ethnic group. They are fearing arbitrary detention based on ethnic origin. Some people from Oromia can be perceived by the authorities to be aligned with the OLA. People from Tigray can be perceived to be aligned with the TPLF. When the conflict among these three regions intensifies, the fear of ethnic profiling increases.

### **Arrival procedures in Bole airport for persons perceived to be affiliated with an opposition group**

14. When a person, who is perceived to be affiliated with any opposition groups, arrives in Bole airport, unless this is a 'clearly known person' to the authorities, the person will not be captured on arrival and detained on the spot. However, the authorities will 'follow-up' at a later point. The follow-up will include questions about who you are, where you are staying, with whom you are staying. This is most likely done in an informal way, rather than by a uniformed police officer.
15. Surveillance is taking place through national institutions via information technologies. This form of surveillance is complemented by individuals who are assigned to be informants.
16. A person who has been denied asylum in a foreign country would not in and by itself be of interest to the Ethiopian government upon their return. Many people believe that seeking the opportunity abroad is beneficial for all, the migrant, their family and the sending country. However, this does not mean that there is no fear of persecution. At times because if one is labeled as a criminal, and if the government wants him, it induces fear in the family as a sort of 'risk by affiliation'.

### **Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia**

17. Following the coming to power of the Prosperity Party in 2018, it improved the Ethio-Eritrean relation and the Ethiopian government promised to implement the 12 December 2000 Algiers Agreement with Eritrea. This time some of the Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia have been told to return to Eritrea thinking that their country is now safe. Then when the two-year conflict erupted in Tigray in 2020, four refugee camps in Tigray where Eritrean refugees were hosted were closed. That was, however, only for a so-called 'honeymoon period' in 2019 until the war erupted and the good relations between Prime Minister Abiy and President Isaias Afewerki ended. During the honeymoon period, many Eritreans came to Ethiopia for family visit and remained in Addis as undocumented migrants. But they were treated very well in Ethiopia and even some are suspected to

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have served in spying Tigrayans for the Eritrean and Ethiopian government. But when the Tigray war ended the Pretoria agreement was signed in 2022 which the Eritrean government perceived as being betrayed as it was part of the war but not part of the agreement. Consequently, by now, Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia have 'clear fear' based on their nationality as the Ethiopian government saw them as threat. By now the Ethiopian government is giving tacit recognition for Eritrean opposition groups in Ethiopia.

18. During the war, when the four refugee camps were dismantled the Eritrean refugees fled to neighboring regions and Addis Ababa. They did not have refugee status and when they left the camps, some went to the Amhara region; others came to Addis Ababa for work, others to Afar region.
19. Recently some Eritreans refugees in Ethiopia have been arbitrarily detained as reported by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.
20. It has not been possible for the Ethiopian government to return anybody to Eritrea, as there is no communication.

### **Field of research**

21. At Addis Ababa University, the majority of students who are interested in migration studies are focusing on migration patterns and return conditions for people returning from the Middle East rather than on the situation of returnees from Europe.

## Academic researcher

Addis Ababa, 15 May 2024

### Treatment of OLF members since the signing of the peace agreement

1. According to the interlocutor, most of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) members are being followed by government spies and many are being detained. Currently, OLF members but also those who are just political vocal, are being oppressed by the government to be 'alarming'. The oppression takes several forms, including exclusion from political participation and being locked into their homes. OLF members are being 'singled out' despite the fact that OLF is an officially legal party because they are actively advancing a political agenda that is against the government.
2. The speaker of OLF, Bate Urgessa, has been shot dead in Meki in Oromia in April 2024, which has also led to feelings of frustration and anger among OLF members.
3. As a consequence, OLF members are largely excluded from the political arena. However, not all OLF members are persecuted but the name of OLF is being used as an instrument of oppression so that people who have never been OLF members are harassed for voicing their concerns on social media or just in conversations with friends. If in these conversations they send the message that they are anti-government, they will be perceived as OLF members.
4. The interlocutor found that there is a differentiated level of attacks against OLF members or persons perceived OLF members: the lowest level of OLF members, ordinary citizens, are likely to be most vulnerable to attacks because they are perceived to be without any form of protection. If the government is attacking the OLF leader, Dawud Ibsa, who had been placed in house arrest, or members of the central committee, they know that this will attract attention from the international community. These attacks lead to self-censorship and self-exclusion from the political landscape.
5. In a mixed neighbourhood in Addis Ababa, being a vocal supporter of the Oromo cause in itself would not put you at risk vis-à-vis your neighbours. However, talking in favour of OLA would be very provocative.

### Treatment of OLA members

6. The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) has been treated by the government 'with fear and respect'. Because of its military force, the OLA leadership has been invited by the government to sit at the negotiations held in Tanzania late 2023. OLA benefits from wide grass root support because it represents the sheer strength to offer support and protection to its supporter. Parents and siblings of OLA members have been attacked by the government.
7. OLA have been responsible for violent actions and these acts have been condemned by the broader community. OLA members are also attacking family members of the government in places where OLA is active but not in Addis.



**OLF members detained on grounds of being alleged OLA member**

8. It is more dangerous for people to be accused of being an OLF member. OLA members are feared because they have power and guns.

**Treatment of family members of OLF-members**

9. If family of OLF members communicates the violence that their spouses, siblings or children may be subject of to the media, or otherwise voice their opinion, the family itself is at risk.

**OLF infrastructure in Addis**

10. There are OLF offices with a physical address and a compound in Addis but because OLF members are hindered in going there, these offices do not function properly as center of political activities. Those who go there may be attacked. OLF has not replaced the physical meeting infrastructure with online activities. Those who are vocal online are more likely to be affiliated with the army branch, the OLA.

**Estimated number of OLF members who are in prison or in informal detention facilities**

11. The exact number of people in prison, who are OLF members, is unknown because everybody is labeled as OLF-members accused of either being official members or of advancing the party's agenda. Furthermore, those who have been imprisoned have been taken by the authorities without them following due procedures of the law, so they are not correctly registered.
12. In addition to the formal prisons, there are a number of informal detention facilities, the so-called 'unknown places' for the detention of Oromos and for Amhara people. These places are not proper prisons; it can be schools that are being used to detain people without informing the public about the existence of such places. According to the interlocutor, these detention facilities are 'brutal places' placed far from Addis Ababa, e.g. in Afar. The temperature may be 40-41 degrees Celsius and access to food is insufficient.
13. The family of the person in detention is not informed about the disappearance. If the family requests the local authorities for information about the disappeared family members, everybody in the office will tell them that they know nothing. If the family eventually finds the person and go for a visit, they themselves will be labeled as in opposition to the government. The government places people in these facilities as a way of installing fear in the population and stopping dissent. According to the interlocutor, this practice is 'rampant'.

**Gender differences**

14. Female political activists are likely to be more vulnerable than male political activists are; women will particularly be attacked online as well as off-line and it will also affect their family.

### **The surveillance apparatus of the government**

15. The state has the technology to conduct digital mass surveillance of its citizens with technology from China and Turkey. The possibilities include the interception of encrypted calls on WhatsApp. Ordinary phone calls are being tapped and online activity on social media is followed. WhatsApp calls have been presented in court as evidence.
16. The state uses citizen informants to physically follow any person that they suspect of something in order to monitor this person's daily activities. Furthermore the system of what is popularly called 'one-to-five' of the TPLF government has been reactivated right after the elections in 2022; it is a system where a person is assigned five people to monitor. It is difficult to 'fly under the radar' for a person who wishes that their political activities remain unknown to the authorities once the government has started to follow this person. It starts at your own doorstep with their neighbours.
17. Surveillance takes different forms in different sectors: at the university campus, it may be through study groups. In the rural areas, it may be through extension workers advancing agricultural technologies through outreach activities. In the health sector, it may be through WASH (water, sanitation, health) agents. Health professionals, teachers and people of a legal background are among the most vocal ones when it comes to political issues. They are particularly followed.

### **Geographical extent of armed struggles**

18. With the armed struggle in the Amhara region means that being an Amhara person is taken as a sign of you being supportive of the armed militias. Whether you are in Addis Ababa, Amhara or Gambela, you may be suspected of being against the government and a traitor. The Tigrayans cannot operate, work or move around the country. They will be treated as traitor. These two groups are likely to be criminalised based on their ethnicity and will have difficulties in accessing basic services.

### **Situation in the Amhara region**

19. Access to internet services has been suspended in the Amhara region.
20. Amhara people are confined and cannot travel to Addis Ababa.
21. The government denies the farmers in Amhara access to critical resources, such as fertilisers and seedlings. The absence of these critical agricultures resources has created a famine-like situation and starvation in the Amhara region. The Amhara region is therefore economically weakened.
22. The Amhara region is attacked with drones every day. Representatives of the federal state has at several occasions explicitly said that the Amhara people are 'the burden of the country'. The purpose of the aggression by the state against Amhara is difficult to explain and understand.

### **Treatment of members of the Fano movement or alleged members of the Fano**

23. In the Amhara region, all Amhara people are labeled as 'Fanos' by the state, as the state does not differentiate between ordinary people and members of the armed Fano militias.
24. The Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has recently (May 2024) made a speech in Nekemte (in the Welega zone in Oromia); the speech contained inflammatory remarks against the Amhara people, and the Prime Minister accused the Amhara people of planning to attack people in Oromia. This kind of hate speech is occurring across the country, not just in Amhara but also in Addis Ababa. Amhara houses are being demolished and business owners in the private sector and managers in the public sector are explicitly advised by the authorities not to employ people of Amharic origin.

### **Level of support to the Fano movement in the population**

25. People in Amhara region are massively supporting Fano. The farmers of Amhara have completely lost hope in the federal government for a number of reasons: the state denies the farmers critical resources for agriculture, there is a lack of access to basic social services, such as health services, and the state is using drones to attack villages in Amhara.
26. Members of the Fano militias attack members of the civil society if they suspect someone of collaboration with the government as an informant. If this suspicion arises, members of the Fano are likely to come to the person or to their family to warn them, and if the person then does not stop collaborating or passing on information to the government, the Fano will attack the family.

### **Ethnic profiling**

27. Even though the government officially no longer use ethnicity as a category on ID cards, a person may be asked by any police officer or other official where they are from, where they are based or about their place of birth (city). When they are asked about their name, this will also be an indicator of ethnicity.
28. When a person applies for renewal of ID-card from the local authorities, their ethnicity will be revealed via their place of birth and their name. If a person happens to not have an ID-card when asked by the police, their name will reveal their ethnicity.

### **Perceptions of the Human Rights Commission's complaint mechanism**

29. According to the interlocutor, people trust the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Via the EHRC, every citizen has the right to complain if they find that their fundamental rights have been violated. However, to file a complaint, the person needs knowledge and skills of how to proceed. The person also needs the confidence and empowerment that comes with education, and these requirements constitute a barrier for people without education and resources.
30. The Commission enjoys general respect because the Commission has insisted on conducting investigations in conflict zones under very difficult circumstances and despite pressure from the government to stop their investigations.

### **Treatment of journalists**

31. Journalists are being imprisoned in increasing numbers if they stand out with political opinions. There is now a least 11 journalists in jail.
32. The government itself is very engaged in public communication on social media; the government actively acts as a producer of content for its various media accounts. The government's various media units have been interfering in the editorial processes of national media.
33. Currently 'The Ethiopian Insider' is the most reliable newspaper. There is an Amharic online radio called "Wazema" (with summaries in English) based abroad that is also trustworthy.

## Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Addis Ababa, 14 May 2024

### Introduction

1. EHRC is an independent federal state body with the mandate for promotion and protection of human rights. As part of their work, EHRC undertakes human rights investigations upon receipt of complaints.
2. The current state of emergency has made the work of EHRC more challenging in terms of accessing regions and finding resources to fund the work, especially as the workload is increasing during conflicts.
3. From July 2023 – Mar 2024, EHRC received approximately 1218 complaints concerning 1496 individuals of which 70.4 % were processed and 78.7% were solved by EHRC. In cases where the EHRC does not investigate the cases, they are referred to the court or the Ombudsman. EHRC is known to the public, and incidents of torture, forced disappearance, detention, internal displacement, accessibility for persons with disability, ill treatment, etc. are reported to the EHRC.

### The Situation in Tigray

*Before the 2022 ceasefire*

4. From 16 May to 30 August 2021, EHRC and OHCHR conducted a joint investigation into alleged violations and abuses against international human rights, humanitarian and refugee laws in Tigray. The report laid the foundation for a transitional justice (TJ) process in Ethiopia. EHRC also advocated to have TJ included in the peace agreement. The report includes several findings, such as atrocities, crimes against humanities, and SGBV used as a weapon of war.
5. When the Tigray conflict spilled over to Amhara and Afar, EHRC conducted similar investigations following the same methodology in these two regions. The findings of the reports covering Afar and Amhara were similar to the findings from Tigray.
6. EHRC had access to travel in Tigray during the beginning of the conflict when the Ethiopian Defence Force (ENDF) was on the ground. When TPLF advanced to Mekelle, EHRC had to cut down the investigation due to the deteriorating security situation. EHRC and OHCHR had to cut down on the investigation in Tigray as they had to leave Tigray due to the escalating conflict, the report received some criticism for not covering the initial scope the investigation. The UN had established an international commission of experts, which were only able to come to Ethiopia once to agree on the investigation scope. However, the commission did not visit Tigray.

### *After the ceasefire 2022*

7. The ceasefire in November 2022 brought relative peace in Tigray, however, the reconstruction of infrastructure and social services is taking too long and Tigray suffers from the extensive devastation. The resumption to a normal life is pending as basic infrastructure, schools and hospitals are yet to be reconstructed. As indicated in the investigation reports, basic infrastructure in Tigray, Amhara and Afar were damaged, and social services were devastated, including health services, schools, and hospitals.
8. Persons with disability are lacking the necessary services. At the same time, new disabilities have occurred after the conflict, which make the reconstruction of basic services more critical.
9. Most IDPs returned to their area of origin before the reconstruction commenced. It was not a hindrance to return as the places of displacement also lacked basic services and support systems. IDPs from the disputed areas, including western Tigray/Welkayit, refrained from returning as those areas were still administered by Amhara forces, and hence, TPLF could not provide protection.
10. In May 2023, WFP and USAID suspended the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Tigray due to reports of food misappropriation. At that time, EHRC tried to lobby for the resumption of food assistance. As a result of the suspension, civilians were penalised for crimes committed by officials. The region had already suffered extensively from the road blocks during the conflict, and following the suspension of aid the Tigray population faced additional suffering and exacerbation of vulnerabilities. When EHRC did the monitoring, they observed how some Tigrayans suffered tremendously and had to adopt negative coping mechanism, such as prostitution and school dropouts to survive.
11. Up to May 2024, the situation is problematic in Tigray mainly because the reconstruction is pending. The Tigray Interim Government is working on a durable solution plan with aims at mobilising funding from donors for sustainable solutions for internally displace persons.
12. EHRC could not confirm to what extent Eritrean forces are still present in Tigray, as the current focus of EHRC in Tigray is to monitor the human rights situation following the ceasefire.
13. There have always been a number of political parties in Tigray, but previously they were too small to challenge or oppose the TPLF. Most of the parties were previously affiliated with TPLF, but currently there is a tendency that the small parties have become more vocal and oppose TPLF by making open statements of the failed deliveries of TPLF.

### **Treatment of Tigrayans**

14. Based on the complaints received by EHRC, ethnic profiling and arbitrary detention or arrest of Tigrayans by authorities have diminished to a minimum since the peace

agreement. The target seems to have shifted to other ethnic groups, namely the Amhara and Oromo population.

15. Based on complaints received by EHRC, TPLF members are currently not targeted by the federal government. The interim government in Tigray consist of TPLF members who took part in the Tigray conflict, and currently attend meetings in Addis Ababa without facing troubles.
16. The source did not have information about violations against Tigrayans residing in Addis Ababa. However, there are complaints of alleged violations by members of the Amhara population.
17. There is no blockage hindering movement in and out of Tigray, however, it might be difficult for some to enter and leave the western and southern part, including Welkait, of Tigray.
18. According to the source, Tigrayans were a more organized group during the conflict, compared to Amhara and Afar ethnic groups, in terms of capacity to mobilise support, advocate and raise international attention.

### **Return**

19. The source was not sure to what extent Tigrayans returning from abroad are subject to monitoring or special procedures.
20. Authorities used to have a list of Ethiopians/Tigrayans abroad who are under suspicion or government surveillance. However, most of those who fled to neighboring countries have returned. Previously, EHRC used to receive complaints about Ethiopians/Tigrayans who were denied from leaving the country.

### **Migration**

21. EHRC has the mandate of monitoring migration patterns. Along the northern route to Yemen and Djibouti, EHRC found an influx of migrants with Tigrayan and Amhara ethnicities, following the ceasefire, as many youths were in a desperate situation and felt inclined to find new opportunities. EHRC observed that both young men and women were amongst those migrating. Saudi Arabia and Yemen have made the borders difficult to cross – some of the migrants were shot in an attempt to cross the border.

### **The situation in Afar**

22. Afar has suffered extensively from the spillover of the Tigray conflict. Prior to the conflict, infrastructure were already at a minimum; only one or two hospitals were functioning for the entire region, which were significantly damaged after the conflict.
23. Most of the IDPs from Afar have returned home, except those from the border of Tigray due to the fear of attack. Moreover, the conflict affected parts of the region of Afar experiences suffering from undetonated IEDs and explosives, which particularly have resulted in casualties of children. There are recent incidents of this.



### The situation in Amhara

24. Another security situation has occurred in Amhara. Although EHRC has an office and staff in the capital, Bahir Dar, EHRC is unable to conduct investigation, as safety and security are major concerns.
25. One of the root causes of the conflict is the narrative of the Amharic population that their issues have not been addressed by the federal government and are asking for the establishment of a transitional government.
26. The Amhara ethnic group does not seem to be well organized in terms of advocating for themselves. Compared to the Tigrayans, they do not seem to have attracted international attention. During the two years of conflict in Tigray, other parts of the country complained that news only focused on the victimisation of Tigrayans and neglected the human right violations and humanitarian needs in other parts of the country.
27. Fano seems to be a fragmented group. According to media news, there are different Fano groups across the region, who may not necessarily work together, and sometimes they go against each other. But when it comes to fighting the federal government, the Fano groups may join forces. In this regard, there are also instances where armed groups hold people hostage for ransom. Hence, civilians are subject to kidnapping by armed groups, and consequently armed groups may experience decreased public support.
28. EHRC could not confirm whether Eritreans forces are training Fano forces and supplying weapons to the militias besides information circulating on social media. Moreover, the source could not give an indication of the size of Fano.

### Treatment of ethnic Amharic persons

29. The ethnic Amharic population is subject to ethnic profiling and arrests by authorities as the Tigrayans used to face during the war in Tigray.
30. Amhara persons outside of the Amhara region, such as in Addis Ababa, are also subject to detention. It is hard to tell what evidence lead to the arrest and detention of Amhara people, and hence, the targeting differs from situation to situation. There is a wording in Amharic *weketawi guday* meaning ‘the current situation’, which is used to describe that the detention is related to the current conflict situation or political crisis.
31. Federal authorities are conducting search in Addis Ababa from time to time. For one month ago, there was a shooting incidence in Addis Ababa. Prior to that incident, authorities were conducting house search during nights in some neighborhoods in Addis Ababa. Certain events may trigger federal authorities to conduct house search, for instance public holidays, festivals or major public events may lead to search because authorities believe that some people take the opportunity to create havoc during gatherings.
32. Persons who are suspected of being affiliated with the Fano are subject to detention by the federal government. There are formal detention centres, but due to the high

number of detainees, the federal government make use of informal facilities. In most cases, the detainees are not brought to court, and if they are, the investigation is not finalised within a reasonable period of time, and authorities tend to ask for an adjournment of 14 days. There is no limit to how long a person can expect to be detained.

33. It is difficult to give an indication of how large a percentage of the Amhara population supports the federal government versus the Amhara armed groups in the ongoing insurgency. Generally, the population would not feel comfortable about voicing publicly who they support.

### **The situation in Somali state and treatment of ONLF members**

34. EHRC is not aware to what extent ONLF supporters or members are being targeted or monitored by the federal government. However, there are incidents of interception and detention based on statements on social media. However, the number of incidents reported is not equivalent to the level of incidents targeting and monitoring of the Amhara population. EHRC mainly monitors the situation for IDPs and refugees in the Somali region, as well as the transitional justice process.
35. EHRC received information from residents of the region that some of the persons who held positions during the previous government are still occupying government positions after the peace agreement in 2019 and after the dissolution of the police. The change that happened in 2019 is a reform rather than a revolution. This means that some officials from the previous regime may still hold positions in the new administration. However, the current government has stated that people should report if they know of people who have committed serious human rights violations occupying official positions.
36. EHRC is not aware to what extent ethnic Somalis or supporters of ONLF are targeted by authorities in Addis Ababa. However, the source came across one ethnic Somali person who had to flee to Somalia and who returned with the support of EHRC.

### **The situation in Oromia**

37. Some parts of the Oromia region is precarious and difficult to access because of ongoing conflict. Some parts of the region is occupied by armed groups. As a consequence of the occupation by armed groups, farmers are prevented from farming their land. Nevertheless, EHRC has conducted assessments of the human rights situation of IDPs, including the humanitarian needs, which have resulted in a published report.
38. The region is marked by high prevalence of armed groups committing crimes, attacking civilians, officials and civil servants as well as revenge and retaliation attacks.
39. Officials travelling from one point to another in Oromia are subject to attacks by armed groups. As a result of this, security and military forces attack people based on suspicion without making distinction between civilians and armed groups. As the armed groups

are part of the same ethnic group in Oromia, it is difficult for security forces to identify who is who and to make a distinction between civilians and armed groups, resulting in arrest, attacks and casualties of civilians.

40. Oromia is, according to the source, the region with the highest amount of arrested and detained people as security forces suspect them for supporting or being affiliated with the armed groups.
41. In most cases, detained people have no access to fair trial and justice systems because the evidence is limited. As there are too few amount of formal detention centres compared to the high number of detained persons, informal detention centres are established.
42. According to the source, a high number of detentions across Ethiopia occur in Oromia as the conflict has been going on for 4-5 years compared to the newly escalating conflict in Amhara.

### **Surveillance**

43. Especially since the activation of the state of emergency, the federal authorities have got a leeway to detain persons whom they suspect or have received information on without court warrant. The methodologies used include low-tech strategies (informants) and social media monitoring. If the authorities suspect someone of supporting Fano financially, authorities may monitor financial transactions conducted.
44. The threshold for monitoring may vary from time to time, and there does not seem to be any pattern of what type of expression or action can bring Amharic persons into troubles. For instance, public holidays, where people are brought together, a certain event or incidences of havoc may lead to intensified surveillance and detention by the federal government. Small gatherings of people may come to the attention of authorities. The level of monitoring can change very rapidly.
45. The federal authorities have a substantial number of agents conducting monitoring. For instance, one agent may have 5 or 6 accounts to monitor social media.

## Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC)

Addis Ababa, 15 May 2024

### Tigray, the aftermath of the ceasefire

1. After the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in Tigray, there are some changes in the scale of targeting of ethnic Tigrayans. During the war there was massive arrests of Tigrayans and everyone who supported TPLF by the federal authorities. After the enactment of the CoHA, the government wishes to prove their observance of the CoHA agreement and that the CoHA was leading to significant change. So, those Tigrayans who had been subjected to mass arrests were released, including several human rights defenders, journalists and researchers. Although the number was limited, there were Tigrayans who allied with the federal government during the war, who were targeted by the TPLF during the war. There are cases of journalists who escaped from TPLF because they did not support TPLF or did not take side during the conflict. The tension has significantly decreased. Currently, there is no targeting or acts against Tigrayans. The shops, businesses and hotels owned by Tigrayans that were closed during the conflict have reopened or resumed back to business. However, the freedom of movement is restricted for those Tigrayans who were working with the federal government. They are currently still subject to surveillance and targeting by the TPLF. Recently, a journalist who worked for a regional TV programme, who escaped from TPLF to Addis Ababa, and he cannot move outside of Addis Ababa due to fear of being targeted by the TPLF.
2. TPLF has split into two groups; 1) a group of those who support the transitional regional administration orchestrated by Prime Minister Abiy and 2) a group of those who are against the transitional regional administration who claim that genocide has been committed in Tigray and that the federal government should be held accountable. This group still raises the issue of the ongoing conflicts between the Tigray and the Amhara regions. The conflict has spilled over to the Tigrayan population that is also split into two.
3. After the ceasefire in Tigray, the federal government is careful and keep all the doors open to people from TPLF people. Even high profile TPLF officials can now travel freely. However, it does not mean that surveillance of TPLF people have stopped. It is not a well-settled situation yet. There is the fear that a conflict can break out again, because both sides (TPLF and the federal government) are blaming each other; the Tigrayan interim administration is blaming the federal government for its failure to fulfil humanitarian needs in Tigray, and the federal government blames the TPLF for not respecting the peace agreement. Although there is an ongoing consultation between the two parties, there is still suspicion and tension. The vocabulary used by the two parties suggests that it is a pre-war situation, as there were same types of statements before the war broke out in Tigray.

4. Especially, in the airport area, there is a serious security surveillance against persons who have travelled to or from Tigray. For instance, they check the ID cards and the background of travelers and position. The government authorities have access to a list of passengers. The authorities may not necessarily restrict persons from travelling to and from Tigray but the authorities will follow the person from a distance and monitor who the person meets with as well as the purpose of the travel. The authorities mainly check high-profile TPLF-members and activists in the Bole airport. The level of surveillance depends on the political tension.

### **The treatment of ethnic Amhara, activists and journalists**

5. During the war in Tigray, authorities checked everyone with a Tigrayan name against an extensive list of Tigrayans who was travelling from Bole airport. If the name of a person was on the list, they would be interrogated by authorities and restricted from travelling. Now the situation has changed so mainly Amhara people are targeted. The authorities keep a list with names of journalist, activists and human rights defenders who are vocal and advocating for the Amharan cause. Authorities (police and security forces) conduct random searches in Addis Ababa, and they check telephones and social media accounts during searches. If the authorities detect any videos or posts related to Fano or OLF, family members will be interrogate and subjected to a background check as well. If there is any indication that a person is involved with or support any opposition movement, authorities will interrogate the person. The checks and searches are conducted randomly almost every evening in Addis Ababa.
6. Some former members of the opposition party, Ezema, have formed a new informal group and they organised a peace rally in Addis Ababa to call for cessation of hostilities. Five of the members were detained. One person managed to escape to Nairobi, and five police officers surrounded his house, while he was in Nairobi, interrogated his wife and children and asked about his whereabouts, after which they destroyed everything inside the house.
7. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) documented that 6 journalists had to flee the country in 2023 due to threats by authorities. In 2024, up to now, 5 journalists were supported by the EHRDC to leave Ethiopia due to threats. According to the interlocutor, this has become a new trend that reminds them of the 2005 election, where the former administration targeted journalists and human rights activists.
8. There is one example of a director of an association for human rights in Ethiopia who went to the UN in Geneva for a meeting on the torture report. The director and her family were harassed and interrogated, and consequently, she could not return home to Addis Ababa.
9. The interlocutor pointed to another example of 12 journalists from one media house who were detained and taken to Afar because of their Amhara background. This is similar to the situation in Tigray.

10. There are conducted massive random searches in Addis Ababa following the conflict in Amhara in 2024. It is random searches with specific purpose; the checks are supposed to find or target people who support or are affiliated with any of the armed groups. Based on reports, thousands of people are being detained for shorter or longer period of times whose ethnic profile is Amhara and they are suspected of supporting the Fano militias. The trend is similar to the previous situation during the war in Tigray where Tigrayans were arrested and detained in Addis Ababa.
11. After the war broke out in Tigray, people were told to share information to the police regarding people whom they suspected to be Tigrayan or affiliated with the TPLF. The federal government used this as a tool to drive the public to inform against each other. The same is now happening against the Amhara people.
12. There are a number of so-called concentration camps, consisting of former school compounds, factories and warehouses, which are outside the formal prison system. Overall, there are massive human rights concerns related to the prison conditions in formal prisons, but the conditions in the concentration camps are horrible. Some of the camps were established following the declaration of the state of emergency. Anyone arrested during these searches have been placed in the camps, and it is almost impossible for someone outside to get insight into the number of detainees and the conditions. One medical worker secretly filmed the conditions in a camp, which showed the suffering of the detainees. Those detained in the camps are Amhara people suspected of supporting the Fano. Thousands of people from Addis Ababa are concentrated in the camps under very harsh conditions.
13. The state of emergency was declared in order to control the situation in the Amhara region, but there are vague provisions saying that the government can implement and enforce the state of emergency wherever the authorities find it necessary.
14. After the adoption of the state of emergency, the Oromo regional government started targeting Amhara people in the region, and hence, no one knows where they are detained.
15. In general, many families submit cases of forced disappearances to the EHRC.
16. EHRDC has made a call of attention to the whereabouts of a well-known human rights activist who was kidnapped and detained based on his anti-war engagement. When the state of emergency was declared, he was arrested during a trip to Barta, and he disappeared for some months. Recently, his family received information that he has been placed in a so-called concentration camp in the Amhara region for the past 10 months with no due process of law. There are risks associated with making calls for releasing persons who are arrested, but EHRDC is continuing their efforts. There are still many journalists placed in detention camps in Afar with no access to due process of law due to the state of emergency.
17. According to the EHRDC, even the Meles Zenawi administration enforced some form of rule of law throughout the country, notwithstanding the human rights violations against critics, journalists and political opponents. In May 2023, the EDF conducted

drone attacks at a school on a Sunday, and to the EHRDC, this signals a complete disregard for the rule of law.

18. Being young and Amhara is enough to put you at risk of detention during searches. The government has a list of activists and social media influencers, and the authorities know where these activists reside, so in case problems occur in Amhara they can arrest these people. It is a method of dismantling any dissent. People are being agitated as a result of their engagement in human rights and political activity, but innocent people with no political or activist background are also arrested. Just by virtue of being young and Amhara can make someone suspected of being a Fano member.
19. On Sunday 12 May 2023, while Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched a new bridge in the Amhara region, a drone strike by the federal government targeted two schools killing a number of teachers and civilians.

### *Gender disparities*

20. Men are more likely to be arrested, but there are female activists and artists who were arrested following a previous Fano-related incident in Addis Ababa. There are incidents of torture and sexual abuse of women activists and human rights defenders. They are more vulnerable to any form of harassment. Gender-based violence has become a common practice in most parts of the country during the conflict, especially in the regions with armed conflict, where SGBV is used as a weapon of war in a similar way as during the war in Tigray where women were massively targeted.
21. EHRC published a report documenting that during the first 6 months after the conflict erupted in Amhara, more than 200 women were raped by members of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF). Many of the women were from IDP camps. Following the publication of the EHRC report, the government blamed the EHRC for defamation and made a press statement announcing that the EHRC is infiltrated by foreign agencies with a political agenda. In addition, some civil society organisations were condemned by the government for showing solidarity with the EHRC.

### *Regional differences*

22. Mass arrests are most widespread in Addis Ababa as well as in the bigger cities in Oromia region and Amhara. Following the incidents where Fano targeted and destroyed a number of prison camps in Amhara for the release of their fellow members and supporters, most detainees are transported from Amhara to Afar or somewhere else to ensure better government control. Fano uses prison breaks as a strategy to gain support from the public; thousands of former prisoners joined Fano after the prison breaks.



### *Fano support and forced recruitment in Oromia and Amhara*

23. In the beginning of the conflict, Fano did not enjoy high support in the population. As Fano was allied with the government during the Tigray war, many Fano members have been supplied with weapons by the federal government. In the beginning, Fano had a structure and had a limited number of members, but once the government started targeting Fano, Fano received increased support. The drone attacks, mass arrests and targeting of civilians by the federal government in the Amhara and Oromia regions, as well as the massive internal displacements of Amhara persons, are used in the Fano campaign to generate increased popular support. According to the interlocutor, the level of recruitment and support of Fano is out of control. More than 75 % of the youths in Amhara have joined the Fano. The growing support confirms the government argument that all Amhara people are suspected for being Fano supporters.
24. Many unemployed young people, who have no hope in Ethiopia and who are suffering, have joined Fano as a result of their grievance to 'the whole system'. The same feeling of grievance is gaining support in Oromia, where young Oromos, who fought and protested against TPLF, have joined OLA as they are disappointed with the government and they have no other opportunities.
25. Kidnapping for ransom has become a common tool by Fano members as a criminal activity to get financial support. They go from door to door and kidnap civilians and negotiate with relatives for their release, especially those who have business or wealthy relatives outside the country are targeted.
26. There is a vocal diaspora in the US, the Arab countries and Europe who sponsor the conflicts.
27. It is well known that the Oromo Liberation Forces have recruited child soldiers. It is unclear to what extent Fano has recruited children. However, some videos have circulated showing children aged between 12 and 17 who are Fano members. It is difficult to determine whether they were forcefully recruited or joined voluntarily. The circumstances and the brutality of the government forces make young people inclined to join Fano for their survival. During the war in Tigray, civilians in Tigray who did not join TPLF were at risk of being killed. This trend is repeated in Oromia and Amhara.
28. Although it is not well documented, it is likely that there are forced recruitment to Fano. Fano made a call to all Amhara youth across the country and urged them to join Fano, otherwise they would be considered government supporters.
29. The Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International documented in a report that families in the Oromia region were killed by federal forces because one of their family members joined the rebel groups. People are squeezed between two conflicting parties; they are in risk of being targeted by both federal forces and the armed groups.
30. Eritrea has trained and supplied weapons to Fano militias during the Tigray war. According to the interlocutor, Fano forces are still being trained in Eritrea.

**Humanitarian needs**

31. Prime Minister Abyi is neglecting the high amount of humanitarian needs and putting pressure on international organisations for them not to disclose the exact number of people who are in need of humanitarian assistance.

## A research institution

Addis Ababa, 16 May 2024

### Treatment of members or alleged members of opposition groups

1. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is one of the oldest opposition movements in Ethiopia and it has been the leading Oromo resistance movement against successive regimes. The OLF had a brief stint of becoming part of the governing coalition in the early 1990s, which was interrupted after the Front's fallout with the EPRDF.
2. For many ethnic Oromos, it has continued to be a symbol of resistance, but it does not constitute a cohesive unit. To a greater extent, it is a 'societal form of resistance,' so it is difficult to demarcate its members from members of the community. At the same time, as an organization, it is characterised by the presence of various factions and internal disputes. In various instances, its different sub-groups have operated as a 'franchise' rather than as a centralized organisation.
3. The OLF has continued its resistance to the current Prosperity-led regional and federal governments. In the last couple of years, the resistance has increasingly morphed into an armed confrontation, with the distinction between armed combatants and the civilian population blurring, which partly explains the persecution in Oromia.
4. Since its establishment, OLF has been through a series of splintering, the latest of which is the formation of OLA, an armed fraction, around 2019. Likewise, in Amhara, the Amhara resistance movement now seems to be represented by the Fano. The Fano seems to enjoy 'substantive mass sympathy and support' from Ethnic Amharas. This 'mass sympathy and support' is often difficult to distinguish from political activism. This blurs the distinction from normal political engagement from support to the ongoing insurgency.
5. Since 2019, OLF has been a legally registered political party, whereas OLA was designated a terrorist organisation' by the House of Representatives at the height of the 2020-2022 War in Tigray. However, individuals voicing the Oromo cause will 'not be labelled', and that in itself is not criminalized. In fact, many in the mainstream political parties, including the ruling PP, are rallying their constituency around responding to long-standing Oromo demands. But the government can easily associate its detractors with the OLA as it sees it fit. The armed struggle remains criminalized, not least due to its designation as a terrorist group by the Ethiopian parliament.
6. It is also unclear which types of actions would be perceived as anti-government in Oromia since Oromia is currently regarded as 'a warzone' because of the conflict between government forces and OLA insurgents. The latter explains the dismal state of the human rights record in the region. Civilians are at risk of being taken for a combatant. According to media reports and credible institutions, such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, the central government applies 'a heavy-handed approach' to anybody who is perceived to be a combatant. A heavy-handed approach in a warzone means that there are mass arrests, and detention of family members of

persons who are suspected of sympathizing with or being members of the armed resistance. Western and Southern Oromia have higher levels of resistance and are particularly hard hit. The more resistance, the more brutal has the government's response been.

7. Kidnappings for ransom as a tactic to gain access to resources is widespread, and the number of these kidnappings has increased. The price for the liberation of the victim rises if it is known that the victim has relatives abroad or in other foreign countries. Therefore, any travel outside of Addis Ababa has decreased significantly. Ethiopian Airlines even recently announced that domestic flights have doubled, and many observers attribute this to the inability to travel by road owing to the insecurity arising out of the conflict. People who can afford it are avoiding any travel by road out of fear.
8. The OLA also uses similar tactics of attacking civilians perceived as government-supported. More than 100 local officials have been killed by the resistance movement by OLA forces in [Oromia](#). That has caused retaliation in a 'tit-for-tat' action. If a person in this conflict zone is perceived to be a supporter of the government, then this person and their family may be targeted by OLA as well.
9. Addis Ababa is not a conflict zone, and Oromos who are vocal about their political opinions would be somehow safe there, especially if they are not engaged in mobilise their 'constituencies' for the so-called unlawful activities. A person's safety depends on how prominent a figure this person is and how dangerous the government perceives the person to be. Some journalists have been perceived as dangerous. If a person is perceived to be affiliated with the OLA, e.g. via posts on social media suggesting and if the person supports the resistance, he/she will be detained. As you can refer from media sources, the State Minister of Peace was fired on accusations of conspiring with the OLA. He was a member of the Prosperity Party, but rumors against him were started and led to his arrest.

### **Extent of surveillance**

10. It is expected that the authorities would scrutinise social media accounts of those suspected of subversive activities for signs of anti-government activity. Digital surveillance includes officials taking note of whom the person likes or what they share or comment on. When political activists and journalists have been detained, the starting point of their indictment in courts has always been material found on social media. There is [media report](#) about the existence of a social media army that advocates for the government's agenda, and seek to debunk the opposition's narratives; the staff of these units follow activists' social media accounts and challenge them online. The government controls the state media, including radio, newspaper and television.

### The situation in the Amhara region

11. There is a high prevalence of mass detention in the Amhara region. It is illustrative of the current situation that some opposition members of the national and regional Parliaments from the Amhara region have been arrested and taken to a place of detention 216 km away from Addis Ababa with no access for their family members and under harsh climate conditions.
12. The exact number of detained Fano members or alleged Fano members in detention is unknown, and there is no way of knowing it as there are no lists available to the public. Fano is increasingly posturing itself as a movement that 'embodies' the Amhara cause so it is gaining increasingly popular sympathy, including in legal political parties as well as in religious institutions.
13. In Amhara, civilians are easily recruited into the Fano militia because Amharas harbour enough legitimate grievances.
14. The Fano was initially an informal militia group, before the war in Tigray, fighting alongside the regional special forces close to the border of Sudan. It has remained a loosely organised decentralised structure. The group has never needed to conduct forced recruitment, as it positions itself as a grievance movement, and most of the youth who joined the Fano militias, joined Fano by will rather than by forced recruitment. Many young people speak of stories to have seen their sister or mother being attacked or heard stories about such incidents and then they go to the bush to join the militia in their area of origin.
15. As in the case of Oromia, if a person is perceived to be working with the government or sympathizing with the government, the person can easily be targeted by the Fano movement. This double exposure creates a very difficult situation for civilians in the Amhara region. The civilians are between a rock and a hard place: they will have to choose which side to join.
16. Many people in Amhara feel betrayed by the central government. The contested land between the Amhara region and Sudan, the contested areas between Tigray and the Amhara region, and the attacks on Amhara civilians in other regions combined constitute fertile ground for further recruitment.
17. The federal government occasionally conducts indiscriminate drone attacks in the Amhara region, which have killed [civilians](#) at a student association meeting.
18. Places, where Amharas can 'fly under the radar' and avoid persecution, would be places outside of the war zones, for example, in Addis Ababa or in the Southern regions. The ordinary/everyday Amharan can easily move to Addis

### Somali region

19. Since the peace deal in 2019 and the removal of ONLF from the list of designated terrorist organisations, the Somali region has been one of the comparably stable

regions in Ethiopia. The diaspora of the Somali region seems to be fatigued by the resistance movement and there are some clans that oppose the ONLF. The federal government has followed two strategies in the Somali region: first, the government has been co-opting major opposition groups, which has contributed to the fragmentation of the regional political landscape, and second, the government has distributed and redistributed rents and resources among powerful groups in order to gain stability. Therefore, some of the ONLF leaders are now 'in businesses'. On the other hand, there is a genuine feeling of 'the periphery being centred' as Somalis are assigned to important positions. The current vice-president of the Prosperity Party (Adam Farah) is Somali, and to a large extent, there is a feeling of being reintegrated into the centre.

20. There seems to be no large-scale prosecution based on individual membership of or affiliation with ONLF in the Somali Region or in Addis Ababa.
21. After the official dissolution of the Liyu police, the sort of Liyu police remains a puzzle. It has been notorious, and now it is much more under the radar. However, the force is intact, and it is still there and kept in the right place by the local leadership. How it is deployed is unknown.

## International researcher

*Online-meeting, 19 April 2024*

### Access to information in Oromia

1. The flow of information out of Oromia is very limited. Journalists and independent monitors are barred from accessing certain areas, and this means that the researcher sometimes has to rely on unconfirmed reports coming from the actors of the conflict themselves. Many of the incidents are reported by either the federal authorities or the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), and UN reports of the number of closed schools etc.
2. A consequence of this lack of journalists, NGOs and general independent monitors in the conflict zones is that a lot of the information coming out of these areas are stories from relatives and other anecdotal evidence. For a researcher, this makes it challenging to piece together a coherent picture of the developments of the conflict.
3. Ethiopia has the second highest number of incarcerated journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, and this naturally dampens the flow of information in the country in general. Furthermore, the conflict in Oromia is barely covered by international journalists.

### Overview of the conflict in Oromia

4. The security situation in Oromia varies across the region. Some parts are relatively peaceful and stable such as the eastern parts of Oromia as well as Bale Zone and some parts of [the Shewa Zones](#). The areas affected by the insurgency are the Western parts of Oromia, including some parts of the Shewa Zones, the Welega Zones (there are several zones in Welega), Guji zone, as well as Arsi Zone (to a certain degree).
5. The researcher stated that there has been a spike in kidnappings in the conflict areas, and it is unclear whether these kidnappings are motivated by political ideals or financial-criminal incentives. According to the researcher, recent events points to the latter being more true, and he further assessed that the lines between politically motivated conflict and conflict for financial-criminal incentives has become blurred in the Oromia conflict (has been true for some years). Political groups has been using kidnapping as way to earn money and criminal gangs have been drawn into the political side of the conflict in Oromia. Kidnappings started as a tactic in the Western parts of the conflict zones but has recently spread to the Eastern parts as well (mainly related to main roads out of Addis, not in the east in general). In the Eastern parts, there have been unconfirmed reports that the OLA has been using kidnapping as a tactic. In this relation, the researcher opined that taxi drivers in Addis Ababa are now afraid to drive out of the city because kidnapping has been prevalent in the outskirts of the city. People are especially wary because the conflict is very dynamic and can fluctuate in scale and intensity very quickly.
6. The researcher has even heard reports that al-Shabaab and even Islamic State are operating in small cells in Bale and Arsi, but he has not been able to confirm this himself.



7. Initially, the current conflict erupted in 2019 when the disarmament agreement between Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ethiopian federal authorities was signed. Parts of the OLF did not want to lay down their arms and broke out under the name of OLA who then took up the fighting. Since then, there has been negotiations between OLA representatives and the federal authorities, but according to the researcher, it is unclear as to whether a deal between the negotiating parties would even bring an end to the conflict because many actors in the conflict have now become financially dependent on it continuing. Furthermore, it is unclear to the researcher whether the negotiating team from OLA enjoys any legitimacy amongst the fighters on the ground (also unclear how coherent OLA is).

### **Conditions for political oppositions, including OLF**

8. OLF remains a legal party in Ethiopia and has – on paper – been part of the legal opposition since the peace deal with the federal authorities in 2019. However, the OLF has been de facto decapitated by the federal authorities in Ethiopia, and cannot in reality function as an actual opposition party. According to the researcher, the legal opposition in Ethiopia is in practice barred from carrying out their work as they are silenced by the federal authorities. This is clearly demonstrated by the assassination of prominent OLF member, Bate Urgessa, whose body was found in the town of Meki on 10 April 2024. Bate had only been released from prison a month earlier.
9. The OLF offices in Addis Ababa remain closed. This is because there is no space for the legal political opposition in Ethiopia. On paper, the OLF is content with the Abiy government and The Prosperity Party (PP) in general, but this is because OLF fear the consequences of voicing a difference in opinion vis-à-vis Abiy and the PP. To be clear, however, the OLF is deeply critical to Abiy/PP.
10. According to the researcher, there is a general climate of fear within the political sphere in Ethiopia – even amongst government officials. This is because the targeting of political figures in the country feels so arbitrary and no one can predict who will be targeted next and for what reasons. In the case of the murder of Bate Urgessa, it is unclear who was responsible and this has made everyone blame each other. What is very clear, however, is that Bate Urgessa was murdered for political reasons.
11. The researcher further stated that the federal authorities are known to order political assassinations. However, they are using the tactic of unpredictability and ambiguity and this makes everyone within the political system nervous. On top of this, the current economic situation in Ethiopia is so bad that crime has been on the rise. This further creates ambiguity in terms of the motives behind assassinations and kidnapping. Wealthy people in general can be kidnapped; OLF leaders can be assassinated for political reasons. Moreover, the government can kill people suspected of supporting OLA and those suspected of supporting the government can be killed by OLA.
12. On members of OLF specifically, the researcher stated that these have been targeted for political reasons by both the federal authorities as well as the OLA.

13. According to the researcher, low ranking members of OLF are more likely to be targeted in cases of assassinations and kidnapping compared to high-ranking members of OLF. The researcher further elaborated that it was surprising that Bate Urgessa was assassinated, because it generally carries more risk for the perpetrator to target a well-known high-ranking official. Therefore, low-ranking members of OLF has generally been the preferred targets. To the researcher, this assassination of Bate Urgessa could signal that the federal authorities feel emboldened.
14. There are no data on whether the politically motivated targeting of politicians in Ethiopia, including the members of the OLF, has increased or decreased in recent years. Part of the explanation for this are the blurred lines between politically motivated crime and financially motivated crime in Ethiopia. However, the researcher stated that based on conversations with sources within the broader Ethiopian political landscape, he senses that there might be an increase in politically motivated targeting of politicians in Ethiopia.
15. Many low-ranking OLF officials are in prison due to their political affiliations. Furthermore, some of the leadership of OLF have also been imprisoned, but they tend to be released again. The researcher added that when OLF members are arrested and imprisoned it is because they have been accused by the federal authorities of being members of OLA as well as being members of OLF.
16. When asked whether persons affiliated with the OLF have been stigmatised or harassed by members of the local population because of their political affiliation, the source stated that he had not heard of such cases, but added that he would not rule this out given the current political climate in the country.
17. Whether or not an OLF affiliate would be approached by the federal authorities if they returned to Ethiopia depends on their activity on behalf of OLF. If the person in question was a low-ranking affiliate with little activity for the party, the risk would generally be lower. However, it is important to stress the unpredictability of the federal authorities, and therefore persecution against returning low-ranking affiliates of OLF cannot be ruled out.

### **Treatment of OLA affiliates**

18. The researcher stated that it is difficult to assess the scale of the federal authorities targeting of persons affiliated with OLA due to the limited flow of information from the conflict zones in Oromia. However, it is clear that many OLA affiliates have been imprisoned and many have been subjected to torture while incarcerated.
19. In Ethiopia, the OLA is an illegal (officially defined as a terrorist organisation) organisation, and this means that the amount of evidence required to arrest alleged OLA members is very low. This also means that family members of alleged OLA members also risk persecution. This is true no matter the rank or position of the OLA member. Any affiliation with the OLA at any level puts the individual at risk of being persecuted by the federal authorities. It is a common tactic in Ethiopian conflicts to

hold family members hostage in order to get to the member of the political organisation the authorities are actually after.

20. The higher the position within the OLA – as well as the alleged position within the OLA – the higher the risk for the family members. A couple of days after the assassination of Bate Urgessa, his family members were arrested. He had been accused of being member of the OLA as well as being member of the OLF and had been engaging in serious political opposition activities.
21. On the other hand, the researcher assessed that a low-level OLA fighter's family would be in less of a risk of being arrested.
22. According to the researcher, the federal authorities have never believed that there is an actual distinction to be made between OLF and OLA even though OLF as a legal party in Ethiopia. They have merely viewed OLA as the armed wing of OLF, and as such, they still believe that the legal political party OLF is conspiring with the illegal armed group OLA.

### **Surveillance capacity in Ethiopia**

23. In the immediate aftermath of Abiy Ahmed's election victory in 2018 the federal authorities relaxed their general surveillance of the population in the political opposition, but in recent years the surveillance has increased again.
24. Informants embedded in local societies and communities constitute the backbone of government surveillance. The researcher stated that the authorities have the capacity to engage in electronic surveillance, but the extent of this is unclear. They are monitoring certain people's social media activity. This would generally be more profiled members of political parties, but could also be a lower-ranking member if they are suspected of something.
25. When asked whether the federal authorities used social media, including Facebook, to stoke ethnic tensions in Ethiopia, the researcher stated that the authorities have not used social media for this purpose. Rather, this outpouring of ethnic discrimination on Ethiopian social media was very much linked to the conflict in Tigray, and the Ethiopian diaspora as well as the intensity of that particular conflict played a central role in this.
26. People under surveillance by the federal authorities can take up residence in Addis in order to fly under the radar. The larger the city, the easier it is to shake the surveillance. However, in order to do so, the person in question has to get rid of their id card (*kebele*) which in turn limits the person's access to rights and services as well as many job opportunities.

## Mehari Taddele Maru, Professor and Academic Coordinator

*Online meeting, 29 April 2024*

### **The security situation in Amhara**

1. The situation in Amhara is characterised by fierce fighting, transitioning from sporadic skirmishes to a well-organised and coordinated conflict. Notably, there is no large conventional Fano army present; instead, the conflict is driven by well-coordinated hit-and-run tactics and guerrilla warfare. The conflict has passed the usual resistance skirmishes to real engagement; almost the entire Amhara region is now under intense fighting and instability. The Ethiopian Defence Force (EDF) is facing serious challenges of transporting armament, personnel and supplies beyond air transportation, as it tend to be met by hit-and-run attacks. This situation is more prominent in Gojjam, Gondor, Wollo and Shewa in Amhara where the fight is focused on targeting the federal government. While the situation cannot be compared to the situation in Tigray, the (federal) army is taking drastic measures resulting in civilians being killed and places being bombarded. Killings and attacks have been well reported in Merawi. Other locations that have been targeted include drone attacks on Finto Selam, Debre Birhan, Wegel Tena and killings in Bahir Dar, Mota and Dangela where people have been killed.
2. Outside the Amhara region, there are well-documented and recent reports of permanent attacks, search, arrests and political attacks and forceful conscriptions, particularly in Oromia and the Addis Ababa surroundings. There are cases in Addis Ababa and the surroundings where the police search for suspected ethnic Amharans during night hours with the stated “aim of removing any threat to the Addis Ababa security” that could be coordinated by Amharans. The search is not merely the result of intelligence but rather a tendency to look out for any potential conspiratorial military or political organisation that pose a threat in outside the Amhara region particularly to the government in Addis Ababa.
3. There are recent reports from Ethio Forum that the Ethiopian National Security Coordination Council has decided to finalise the military operation by ENDF in Amhara before the rainy season starts in the end of May or beginning of June. It is the assumption that ENDF has less capability to maneuver their operation during rainy season. Large size of army is being transported to Amhara region from various directions. Contrary to ENDF, Fano is more mobile and not mechanised, and their operation would not be challenged by the rainy season. This launch of this ‘final operation’ is expected to lead to intensified fighting and potential killings of civilians in the Amhara region.
4. In relation to facilitating the return of IDPs to southern Tigray, an agreement between the federal government and the interim administration of Tigray, there were recent reports of sporadic violence and assassinations in the towns of Kobo and Alamata based on resistance to the agreement. However, the fighting was relatively minimal and seemed to be resolved. In Southern Tigray, there are still sporadic fighting

between some Amhara forces and TDF, and attacks on officials and civilians including to Alamata Woreda official who was appointed after annexation of the area by Amhara forces. Seven civilians including children were also killed by Afar forces in Raya Azebo.

### Treatment of ethnic Amharans

5. Compared to the fighting in Tigray that cease in 2022, the treatment of Amharans is not marked by industrial scale arrests but rather search in Oromia region and across Addis Ababa in the sense that the police conducts patrolling during the night where they enter properties, steal valuables and expose the Amharans to extortion. This type of search is conducted on a regular basis and has also been reported within the past 2-3 days. Amharans are identified based on their accent. The government has categorised some parts of Addis Ababa as so-called 'green zones' with the aim of maintaining stability and security and protecting the city from Amharans moving into Addis Ababa. This initiative has effectively been carried out for the past 3 years. The police initially look for armament and documents but take the opportunity to use other tactics against Amharans, such as threatening, harassment, intimidation and damaging of properties.
6. The search/extortion is most prevalent in the outskirts of Addis Ababa and on the transportation corridors and main highways. The middle and upper class are not exposed to the same level of extortion as mostly they avoid land transport but they still face the extortion when filing in and out of Bole Airport. There were several social media reports on this. Individuals suspected of being supporting the armed resistance and protesters are more vulnerable to arrests and extortion.
7. Unlike the Oromos and Tigrayans, the armed resistance is not led by a political party representing Amharans. However, it is currently the situation that anyone who opposes the federal government is considered a Fano representative. Practically, Fano has become name for all Amahara armed resistance movements.
8. Fano has within the past 8 months to 1 year been turned into well-organised, though divided, military wing from being a small armed units movement. The Amharans are facing divisions among the different geographically designated Fano brigades. Large urbanite Amhara elite disassociates themselves from Fano and those residing in Amahara urban areas may find it challenging to reside while supporting or opposing Fano due to risk for their livelihood and physical security reasons, and hence they may want to leave outside the Amhara region and with limited options as neighbouring Oromia even Addis Ababa could be menacing to them. These Amharans may be are vulnerable to government suspicion and surveillance.
9. The professor answered that he did not know of cases where Amharans, residing outside Amhara, face horizontal resentment or discrimination from the general population due to the conflict between the federal government and Fano. However, the professor stated that the federal government or the Oromia regional state discriminate and attack the Amhara population in an organised way though much harshly as it did with Tigrayans. It is very unlikely that Amharans are targeted to same

degree as the Tigrayans were targeted during the Tigray war. This is partially attributed to the fact that the general population in Ethiopia now, unlike in 2021, is fed up with conflict and want peace at any cost. Oromo people would only attack Amhara civilians based on the two following scenarios: 1) they are brainwashed by the Oromo elite to believe that Amhara people pose a threat to them or 2) if their livelihood such access to land or power is under threat. The Ethiopian government makes a deliberate effort to equal the Oromo people with the Prosperity Party calling itself 'an Oromo Ethiopian government' or 'an Oromo Ethiopian leadership', so an attack, armed resistance or peaceful opposition to the Ethiopian government would be considered equivalent to an attack on the Oromo People led Ethiopian government thus against Oromo interest in resource, power and identity. As a result, there is tension and distrust between Oromo and Amharan communities. Moreover, the fact that the police and military forces that are deployed to protect Addis Ababa as in the green zones are predominantly Oromos and could trigger hate and tension between the two ethnic groups. Finally, Oromos have attacked Amharans and vice versa in the Oromo zones in Amhara.

### **Monitoring and surveillance of Amharans**

10. In Amhara, there has been at least 3 attempts of efforts to train a regional Amhara force under the name Rapid Deployment Forces to fight the Fano militia. The force included intelligence-gathering officers from the local community who were supposed to collect intelligence amongst Amharans. However, the effort was not successful due to overall resistance; many of the members escaped and joined Fano with the weapons given to them by the military despite being better paid than ENDF personnel. Hence, the capacity of intelligence gathering of Amharans in Amhara is limited. In Oromia, the situation may be different due to overlapping identities and loyalties where there is propaganda campaign and large opportunist Oromo elite that is willing to benefit from the government approach to equate the government as an Oromo government. Thus, the Oromo elite is highly divided due to the opportunity presented by the government if they support its incumbents.
11. According to the professor, it is possible for Amharans to fly under the radar depending on the willingness to take risk. As the situation intensifies, more Amharans will likely side with Fano in the conflict, because Fano has proved such a formidably resistance to the ENDF, and because the conflict has become so ethnicised. Moreover, it is unlikely for the ENDF to wipe out Fano while Fano may not overwhelm ENDF entirely thus the chance for the war to continue for foreseeable future save for shocks. The professor is of the opinion that the damage caused to the coherence between the Amharas and the federal authorities is irreversible because of the ethnic element and the intensity of the conflict. It is difficult to assess how protracted this conflict will be.

### **Forced Recruitment**

12. Forced conscription of youngsters to ENDF training camps is ongoing. In Gojjam especially, the Fano militia seems to be well-resourced financially and effective in their outreach effort, which attract many young people to join Fano. There could be increased recruitment in the bordering areas of Amhara and Tigray as well as western Tigray, although federal forces are reinforcing in order to oppose the recruitment to Fano.

### **Access to information in Amhara**

13. It is generally challenging to uphold an information blockade in the Amhara region. For instance, there was an attempt to impose a blockage in northern Shewa for 2-3 months, which was challenging due insufficient amount of persons to maintain it. In comparison, in Tigray it was easier to control the flow of information as it was a coordinated effort by the Eritrean army, Ethiopian army and regional forces. According to the professor, there will always be loopholes in the information blockade in the border areas of Amhara. In worst case, information will be channeled through the border areas to Sudan.

## An international, humanitarian organisation

Addis Ababa, 13 May 2024

### Conditions upon Return

1. This organisation works with voluntary returnees. Most cases involve returnees from the Middle East, neighbouring countries, and Southern Africa. It also deals with a few cases of returnees from Europe through the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programme.
2. Ethiopian returnees choose to return for a variety of reasons. Returnees from Europe often return because they have failed to obtain a residence permit one way or another. Returnees from Djibouti often return because they encounter difficulties in migrating further, either due to lack of financial means, health issues, or because they are being prevented from traveling further.
3. Regardless of the circumstances of their return, it is very common for returnees to feel as if they have failed in their task – failed themselves but often also their family or local community who might have invested in the migrant. As such, returnees are often in debt to their family, who now have an extra mouth to feed. This means that Ethiopian returnees face challenges on a mental, financial, and social level upon return to Ethiopia, making the task of reintegrating the returnees into society challenging. Moreover, many Ethiopians choose to migrate because they initially find themselves in a difficult economic situation. Returnees often face even more difficult economic situations upon return.
4. The organisation collaborates with the Ethiopian government in trying to reintegrate the returnees into their local communities through reintegration projects which directly benefit the returnees, community based initiatives which aim to address the drivers of migration and other key priorities identified by communities and capacity building intervention which aims to improve government capacity to put in place structure and system which can address migration challenges, including return and reintegration. Ethiopia is a large country with many rural communities that are difficult to reach. If the economic situation of the returnee is not dealt with properly, they are likely to re-migrate. However, improving the economic situation for the individual often takes time since people who migrate often lack formal education. Furthermore, it can be difficult to access the labour market in Ethiopia, especially since the private sector focuses on personal connections when recruiting. The organisation offers short-term training to returnees and provides them with in-kind reintegration assistance (startup capital) and some pocket money to get them going.
5. Because returnees are often in debt to their family or local community, some are so ashamed and view themselves as failures that they want to settle down somewhere else in Ethiopia. Furthermore, due to the current conflicts in Amhara, some parts of Oromia, and impact of the conflict in Tigray, reintegration have



become significantly more challenging because large parts of these regions are difficult to access or conducive for sustainable reintegration. In the framework of its return and reintegration activities, The organisation is currently not returning anyone to Amhara because of on-going conflict in the region. Since the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the federal government and Tigray interim administration, the region is regarded as relatively stable. However, due to the scale of destruction in Tigray, the organisation still does not return people to Tigray.

6. People from Southern Ethiopia tend to migrate south towards South Africa, whereas people from Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray often choose the Eastern route through either Djibouti or Somalia towards the Gulf, mainly Saudi Arabia. Few Ethiopians choose the northern route towards Europe.
7. In the framework of its return and reintegration support, the organisation assesses each case individually to determine whether the return is voluntary or not. The notion of consent is paramount. As such, the organisation only assists the returnee once they have given consent. Furthermore, the organisation provides counselling to ensure that the decision is made on an informed basis.
8. Victims of trafficking (VOT) are handled differently due to the nature of their vulnerability. In such cases, the organisation collaborates with service providers who specialise in assisting VOTs. The organisation also helps to build the capacity of the Ethiopian government to help them provide better services to these victims. However, it is often difficult to assess whether an individual is a VOT due to the nature of trafficking in person.
9. The government does not provide shelter for returning VOTs. These services are provided by NGOs.

### **Monitoring Returns**

10. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisation merely had to inform the authorities of returns, but during the pandemic, regulations were changed so that the organisation had to seek approval from the government to return individuals. This was mainly due to public health concerns but it was later adopted as an approach applicable to all returns, especially large movements. Since the pandemic, the organisation now coordinates the issuance of travel documents with the local Ethiopian embassies and consular departments. The Ethiopian postings are then informed of the number of returnees, and they relate the numbers and how many travel documents were issued with the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and then the organisation can return the individuals. This process can be an issue in countries where the number of returnees is very high, such as Yemen.
11. The land borders between Ethiopia and the neighbouring countries are rather porous. The land border stretches almost 5 300 kilometres and has 18 official border-crossings, six of which have an electronic system in place that can register

entry and exit. However, these systems are fragile since the border-crossings experience power-outs, but they do register some amount of data. The data collection for the remaining border-crossings is very analogue since it is basically a civil servant calling for border-patrol from Addis to receive the number of people who crossed that particular border-crossing for the day.

12. Bole International Airport has the most stable electricity connection in all of Ethiopia since the airport is of great economic importance for the government. This means that the airport has electronic systems in place and that staff of the airport will have the data of each individual who entered or left Ethiopia, except when Ethiopians are mass deported from Saudi Arabia and all arrive at Bole at the same time. In those circumstances, the staff at Bole does not have the capacity to register the deportees in the electronic databases. The organisation provides immediate post-return assistance to the deportees from Saudi upon arrival.

## Martin Plaut

Online interview, 3 May 2024

*Martin Plaut is a journalist, based in London. He was the Africa Editor of the BBC World Service News until 2013 and works primarily on southern Africa and the Horn of Africa. He has published books, articles and comments on Ethiopia and Eritrea over the years.*

*The security situation in Ethiopia since September 2022*

1. The current situation in Ethiopia is characterised by a high level of complexity; the fluidity and unpredictability of the security situation calls for precautions about any forecast because things may change from one week to the other. The problems are manifold: including the fact that the Pretoria Agreement (of 2 November 2022), which ended the Ethiopia-Tigray war, did not deliver sustainable peace or really resolve anything, albeit it stopped the most serious fighting, which obviously in itself was a relief for the affected populations. However, the agreement did not resolve the question of who owned the places over which the fighting had been about, in particular Western as well as Southern Tigray. Both are claimed by the Amhara and the Tigrayans.
2. The current conflictual situation of Ethiopia has a long history with almost ceaseless clashes between local leaders. Since 1880, the key question of Ethiopia has been how to find a balance between the center and the periphery. Sometimes the conflicts have been between the major powers controlling Ethiopia, at other times it has been between fractions within these powers. Menelik II expanded the territory of the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century so that it now includes more than 80 ethnicities. All of these groups wishing to exercise their given rights, but are denied or restricted in exercising these rights by the elite in the center, be it the Tigrayans or the Amhara.
3. Over the past weeks (ultimo April 2024) there has been renewed fighting in southern Tigray as Tigrayans attempt to regain areas they had been pushed out of that they claim is theirs.
4. There are 3 simultaneous conflicts in Ethiopia, all driven by the periphery striving for a higher level of autonomy. The most recent of these conflicts, the Tigray war, was in essence a war between the Tigrayans and the Amhara. The conflict between the Ethiopian government and the Oromo (one third of the population), is further complicated by the fact that the Oromo are themselves divided into fractions and splinter groups.
5. A number of external actors –Eritrea, Somalia and the Arabs –also play a role on the security situation in Ethiopia. First, Eritrea –once a part of Ethiopia– and its president Isaias Afwerki strives to gain a central position in the Horn of Africa. He seems to be determined that as long as he is excluded from such influence, Ethiopia will not be allowed to gain stability. Currently, he seems to be excluded, or ignored, and his relations with Prime Minister Abiy appears poor, although that could also change rapidly. Secondly, Somali troops were brought into Eritrea prior to the most recent

Tigray war, and there is evidence they fought alongside the Eritreans during the conflict. The Eritreans and Tigrayans were accused of committing the worst atrocities against Tigrayans, particularly women.’ There is a lack of discipline among all military groups, including in the Tigrayan forces, who also committed atrocities, especially against the Amhara. Thirdly, there are large sums of money that has been introduced from the Arab world, in particular from the UAE.

### *The situation in the Tigray region*

6. The World Food Programme (WFP) and the USAID recently discovered that there had been vast diversions of food donated by these two agencies. Some appeared to have been sold on the international market. Further investigations showed that these diversions were not only occurring in the Tigray region, but that the Tigray region was badly affected by this theft. Senior members of the administration and the Tigrayan military were found to have allowed donor-funded food to be taken from their own people and sold on the black market. The evidence was so overwhelming that the WFP and USAID had to suspend all food aid, and introduce a new system of checking the delivery of aid.
7. This fraud exemplifies the wider economic entanglement, with the Tigrayan elites having money, interests and investments outside of Tigray. This was developed through the *Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT)*, a mechanism established during the war against the Derg. Money was taken from aid and from other sources to build up Tigrayan resources abroad, but came to benefit of these elites. During the Tigray war, some of the money from foreign investments were channeled back into Tigray, so that they could, for example, continuing broadcasting even when they were surrounded, with equipment paid for from abroad.
8. The Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Marxist-Leninist group within it (MLLT) has had a stranglehold over Tigrayan politics for many years; they actively excluded smaller political groups from any serious role in decision-making. That has contributed to much of the anger over the way the war was conducted and the high loss in human lives. The evidence of diversion of aid only contributes to anger among those who were not members of the TPLF elite and therefore excluded from the funds.
9. There appears presently to be no clear evidence of the Ethiopian government being involved, in or responsible for, preventing humanitarian aid from reaching Tigray.
10. The worst affected areas in Tigray are the western areas where people were forced out of their homes by the Amhara, and later by the Fano militias, as well as the southern areas of Tigray. The north of Tigray continues to be badly affected by the Eritrean occupation.
11. Another issue, which fuels the conflict, is the lack of a clear demarcation of the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in spite of the work of the border commission, which ruled where the legal border lies. Large communities along the border, especially in Irob, do not recognise the Boundary Commission’s decisions stipulating that they are a part of Eritrea. The Boundary Commission’s ruling was a result of the decision by the

Eritrean and Ethiopian governments of the time to insist that the border be decided solely on the basis of maps and customary practice, *ex aequo et bono*. Both nations can, of course, agree to move the border by agreement at any time.

### *Fano*

12. Bearing in mind that the conflict architecture changes rapidly, the Fano militias now seem to be independent of the Addis administration and closer to President Isaias. This gives him the option of using an important actor as a lever against Prime Minister Abiy. The tactic of undermining his neighbours is one President Isaias has deployed repeatedly since taking power in 1991. Given the complexity of the conflicts this gives scope for President Isaias to target 'anybody who is not on my side.'

### *The situation for journalists and the media.*

13. In Ethiopia, there is some space for the media to publish critical journalism. Occasionally, 'the curtain comes down' and journalists are arrested. It was impossible for journalists to report from the front line during the Tigray war. Foreign and domestic journalists were prevented from going to the front and covering the war, despite the fact that it cost the lives of up to 600 000 civilians. There is not any possibility of independent reporting from Eritrea, which is at the very bottom of the global rankings produced by Reports Without Borders.
14. Some of quality newspapers in Ethiopia are Addis Standard and The Reporter. Both are reliable sources and their staff of journalists manage to give an accurate picture of the situation in Ethiopia, despite coming under government pressure. The space to report critical analysis about the political situation, including about the prime minister exists, even though some of his financial dealings are off limits. The media abstains from covering questions that are too sensitive. Foreign correspondents are tightly controlled through the government's refusal to issue, or renew, visas. Some are excluded, including the highly respected correspondent of the Economist, Tom Gardner.

## The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO)

Addis Ababa, 16 May 2024

### Introduction

1. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), which was established in 1991, is a non-governmental organisation that envisages a democratic system, including rule of law and the protection of human rights through monitoring, investigation, documentation and reporting of human rights violations in Ethiopia. There are 9 branch offices across Ethiopia with approximately 30 full time employees. In addition, there are hundreds of numbers of volunteers of members across the country.
2. During the past 32 years of operation, EHRCO staffs and members have been subjected to arbitrary arrests, harassment, intimidation and extrajudicial killing. The investigation and reporting department office of EHRCO was broken into in February 2023 by security forces where the departments head laptop with important data was taken. On 5 January 2023, 5 employees were arrested and detained for 8 days as they were investigating human rights violations in a suburb of Addis Ababa, regarding house demolition and eviction complaints submitted to EHRCO. Addis Ababa City Administration sent a warning letter of legal suit to EHRCO accusing the organisation of publishing false information, inciting violence, which EHRCO has rejected by writing a response. Given the current challenging political climate, human rights organisations expect arbitrary arrests, intimidation and harassment from the government. The human rights situation and the safety of HRDs are highly concerning in Ethiopia, which is the worst case scenario, as the government is arresting arbitrarily and attacking journalists, activists, opposition political parties, and HRDs. The pressure and concerns are ever growing at alarming rate.

### The overall human rights situation, surveillance and access to information

3. EHRCO has various systems and methods of information and evidence gathering, including receiving information via phone messages, phone calls, videos, and other digital ways of receiving complaints of human rights violations, and then it will deploy its experts to collect evidences and to corroborate. Moreover, there are human rights investigators at the 9 branch offices with legal knowledge backgrounds who are capable of receiving reports through various channels and in many formats .
4. Human rights organisations at the local level are wedged between the political arena and a political culture that has become ingrained in the society over time. The politicisation of human rights means that human rights defenders must scrutinise who the victim is and conduct thorough background checks which is necessary in passing on information from informants. This risk complicates the information gathering procedures, and the human rights organisations need to be careful about whom they receive information from. There is a politicisation of human rights violations.

5. According to the interlocutor, it is the 'worst situation ever' for operating as a human rights organisation having experienced a long history of conflicts and repressive regimes for the past 32 years.
6. The increased repression of the civic space and the digital space leads to growing apathy. One can be silent because of fear, but being apathetic is the most dangerous thing because 'you don't care anymore'.
7. 22 out of 28 complainants received by the EHRCO from the Oromia region were arrested upon their departure from one of the EHRCO branch offices. The arbitrary arrest is in itself a human rights violation but these arrests also demotivate all other victims because it gives the impression that they risk compromising their security and protection when submitting a complaint. These situations also complicate the information gathering and access to information and depilate HRDs efforts.
8. The government has increased its technological pressures; its surveillance system may not be comparable to neighbouring countries. This system gives the government a network of informants that can work against human rights defenders.

### **The situation in Amhara region and ethncisation**

9. Based on information received from members of the branch office in Amhara, the situation is really dire in Amhara region with arbitrary killings, arbitrary arrests, and an increasing number of IDPs. Attacks and killings are based on accusations of being a Fano member or suspicions of family members being members of Fano, or supporting of the group which works as an excuse to attack or arrest. It can likely lead to arrest if it comes to the attention of the government that a friend or brother joined Fano. Hundreds are arrested because of their Amhara background. The situation of ethnic profiling during the Tigray war has now been replicated on Amhara against Amhara people.
10. The number of arrests is worrisome. The state of emergency was declared for the Amhara region but it is used across the entire country. After the interview, the source noted that the emergency law has been lifted.
11. Most of those arrested are detained in military camps. The arrests are conducted by the federal and regional government. Moreover, freedom of movement is restricted; it is not easily possible to leave the Amhara region for Addis Ababa, as police officers will stop anyone at the checkpoint.
12. Due to the deteriorating security situation, EHRCO has reshuffled its branch office from Gonder to Bahir Dar and scaled down two offices to one office in Amhara, the same has been done to its other branch offices. The activities of EHRCO have become limited due to the insecurity and the restricted movement. Moreover, internet connection is limited in the region, which makes exchange of information challenging.

### The treatment of political opposition members

13. The silencing and discrimination against political opposition members are happening at many levels. Currently, there are two well-known cases that have given rise to public attention. The first is the case of Christian Tadele, an Amhara opposition politician of the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA), who was arrested early in the Amhara conflict, as he became critical to the government. He was arrested, despite having immunity as an MP, and he was placed in a military camp, and recently brought before a court after seven months of detention.<sup>391</sup> The other recent case is the killing of Bate Urgessa, a former senior official of the OLF, who has been occasionally arrested over the years.<sup>392</sup> And recently he was killed no one took responsibility. The two cases have attracted international outcry and attention amongst human rights organisations. The two cases contribute to a restricted environment for other political parties to operate in. The government silences everyone who are being vocal for human rights. Lawyers representing Amhara people get arrested and intimidated.
14. After the declaration of the state of emergency it has become more common to arrest critics of the government based on the argument that they challenge the peace and stability of Ethiopia. (The state of emergency is now is lifted)
15. During the reform period of 2018 and 2019, there were some rays of hope as institutions and a new normative framework were formed and the civic space was opened. However, over the past years, the government has reversed and worked against the implementation of laws, repressed democracy and the civic space, and now we are back to the state of challenging civic space. The government is systematically attacking the civil space and not abiding by the human rights principles. The human rights situation is the worst case scenario. 'Anything can happen to anyone and anywhere tomorrow or the day after tomorrow'.

### Gender disparities

16. EHRCO recently went to Tigray and visited different IDP centres where 50+ IDPs, mainly women, were interviewed. It became clear that women have suffered tremendously from the conflict, and that the government has not learned the lesson from Tigray in regards to the conflict in Amhara. Women in conflict may suffer from the multiplication of vulnerability, as they might also suffer from the death of beloved ones or death of a husband, or even disability. Also, displacement is a factor which makes women vulnerable to myriad of risks and challenges
17. Women are faced with multiple vulnerabilities. In Tigray, women were devastated as they lived with the active war in their minds. In one of the IDP camps in Tigray that was recently visited by EHRCO, the women could not contain themselves because they were

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<sup>391</sup> The Addis Standard, *News: Parliament revokes immunity of Christian Tadele seven months after his arrest*, 14 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>392</sup> BBC News, *Bate Urgessa: Ethiopian opposition OLF figure shot dead and dumped by road*, 10 April 2024, [url](#)



still 'in a war zone in their heads'. Female human rights defenders are also highly vulnerable to various attacks and victimisation.

18. Conflicts leave a wound in women and children that does not heal when the conflict is over. For instance, during the conflict in Tigray women were victims of gender-based violence and sexual assaults, which were rampant during the Tigray war. This was one of the most horrible aspects of dimensions of that conflict. Even though a peace agreement has been declared, it still leaves mental scars that do not disappear just because the guns have fallen silent. Many husbands of women were killed during the conflict, which has destroyed family structures leaving women more vulnerable. When men come back to their families, they might suffer from mental health issues that may likely lead to increases in gender-based violence in communities, which lasts longer than the conflict itself.
19. There are a number of women combatants, who might have been forced to fight in a conflict. They face challenges in the process of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). For instance, they may have a difficult time being reintegrated into a society with a patriarchal structure as being a female combatant is associated with a lot of stigmatisation, social exclusion because the women had to leave their female role behind in order to fight. The international community also bears a large part of the responsibility as the reintegration process is designed mainly for men. For instance, there is a lack of employment opportunities and psychologists to support women with their mental health.
20. In the process of the Pretoria peace agreement, no women participated, although women are the first to go through most of the agony and suffering as they were victims of SGBV violation. The government is hesitant to approve the National human rights Action Plan and fails to stop conflicts and provide rehabilitation and facilitate the sustainable relocation of IDPs.

## An international organisation

Addis Ababa, 17 May 2024

### Conditions upon return

1. The Ethiopian returnees from Europe are mostly migrants and failed asylum-seekers. The government Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS), which is a counterpart of UNHCR on refugee issues as well as on refugee returnees, has a project funded by EU to provide support to these returnees. Resource are constraint. An EU funded programme contributes to the reception of migrant returnees and failed asylum seekers from Europe. However, the program will phase out in 2024.
2. The majority of returnees to Ethiopia (as of May 2024) are from Sudan, because of the expanding conflict in the country. Another large group of returnees are from Yemen. With regard to refugees from Sudan, initially the majority were former Ethiopian refugees who have resided in Khartoum but as the conflict has expanded into the refugee camps, they have spontaneously returned to their country of origin. More than 10 000 have already been received and approximately 50 000 more are expected soon to return. The Yemeni caseload includes Oromos, Somalis and to some extent also people of Amhara origin, as well as others. They have been in Yemen (or other Gulf countries) for several years as refugees. They are returning as part of IOM's Voluntary Humanitarian Program (VHR) program designed for the safe and dignified return of migrants stranded in Yemen.

### Differentiated reception of refugees depending on which country they return from

3. Ethiopia is a transit country for refugees (e.g. coming from Sudan), a destination country for other refugees and a sender country as well.
4. Returnees are received in the same way regardless of which country they return from. So-called failed Ethiopian asylum seekers returning to Ethiopia are the primary responsibility of government.
5. The reception of victims of trafficking relates to the National Partnership Coalition that coordinates efforts to receive victims. The group is led by the deputy prime minister. The national partnership coalition has different working groups under it.
6. The northern route from Ethiopia to Europe is not as used any more as prior to the conflict in Sudan, especially for Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali refugees.
7. The RSS remains the legally mandated office of the Government for refugees including for registration, documentation, protection and camp management. The capacity of the RSS varies depending on the specific technical area. Regarding the returnee programme, the capacity is still low as that has not been as highly prioritised as the refugee management. Currently, RRS receives support for the registration of refugees and asylum processing, but the aim is that the RRS will take over the full responsibility once the required capacity is reached. RRS is applying UNHCR tools for the registration of asylum seekers and refugees. The handover of responsibility for registration of

asylum seekers has started in Addis Ababa and in Las Anod but there is still a lot of capacity development to be carried out for the RRS to be able to fully do the registration. Data quality and integrity is a particular concern within registration and asylum processing.

8. During the war in Tigray, all the refugee camps in Tigray have been either closed or destroyed. A high number of refugees have been victims of human rights violations, including kidnapping and gender-based violence. Many of those refugees moved to Addis Ababa and the rest moved to the Amhara region and the Gondar areas. The Berhale camp in Afar was also attacked, so those refugees also moved, and camps were established in Sardo near Semera. After the cessation of hostilities, most of the refugees in Serdo have returned. An overwhelming number of refugees from camps in Tigray have come to Addis Ababa. The government has recognised many of the self-relocated refugees on the 'out-of-camp policy' (OCP), so their stay has been legalised in order for them to not encounter any protection problems. However, these refugees did not get enough material assistance (compared to when they were inside the camps), and they could not get access to documentation and economic opportunities.
9. When a state of emergency was declared in November 2021, a suspension of registration and issuance of documents for anyone followed. Therefore, as many as 98 % of refugees do not have valid documentation after that. In 2023, documentation services have resumed in Addis Ababa, and documents are gradually being issued again but a huge caseload remains. A high number of Eritrean children born in Ethiopia are very likely to lack civil documentation due to suspension of registration and documentation services.
10. The refugees who arrived in Ethiopia after the suspension of registration in 2021, have limited access to asylum except those coming from conflict emergencies in neighbouring Sudan and Somalia. There is generally a moratorium on access to asylum for new arrivals including Eritreans. Unregistered refugees are particularly vulnerable to risks of denial of services, detention, onward movement including smuggling and trafficking. Around August 2023, approximately 360 unregistered Eritreans and few registered refugees have been deported by bus to Eritrea from Ethiopia.
11. Access to asylum at Bole International Airport is very limited. Only very few are successful at seeking asylum at the airport. There is a general suspension of access to asylum with the exception of emergency context (such as Sudan and Somalia).

### **The situation in Amhara**

12. The situation in the Amhara region has been very volatile since April 2023. When the government decided to disband the regional Special Forces, it led to skirmishes and the full-blown conflict in the Amhara region between the federal forces and the Fano militias, followed by the declaration of the State of Emergency in August 2023 (which was extended after the initial 6 months). Even though the State of Emergency was proclaimed especially for the Amhara region, it contains a paragraph saying that it may be applied in other regions as needed.

13. The security situation has deteriorated significantly since 2023 and the humanitarian situation has gone worse. Coordinating humanitarian response has been challenging due to insecurity and logistical issues. Telecommunication services have been shut down (except for a call service), and there is no internet service in the region.
14. In the Amhara region, there is a general breakdown of the rule of law. The refugees are concentrated mainly in two areas in Gonder: Alemwach in Debark where Eritrean refugees who have been displaced from Tigray are hosted and in Metema where refugees from Sudan are accommodated. There are many checkpoints in these areas. There are reports of insecurity and attacks against refugees by unidentified groups including as recent as May 2024.
15. The Amhara region hosts a very significant IDP and refugee population: there is approximately 29,300 refugees, and about 66,100 IDPs and 309,900 IDP returnees (as of May 2024). Most of the IDP locations are in the eastern parts of Amhara, which are also the hotspots of the conflict. Most of the IDPs are displaced from Oromia.
16. There are reports of detentions of ethnic Amhara persons who are believed to be associated with the Fano groups in various locations, including in Addis Ababa. The State of Emergency, initially meant for the Amhara region, is also being applied in Addis Ababa and elsewhere and ethnic Amhara people are detained on suspicion. Politicians, human rights activists, journalists and members of the Parliament have been detained.
17. The most active armed opposition groups in the Amhara region are the Fano militias and the Kemant Liberation Front in the Gonder area. The government forces and the regional special forces are also active (these forces have been absorbed into various regional security structures mainly into riot police and they are fighting together with the ENDF). So far, there has not been reported cases of direct skirmishes between Fano forces and other armed opposition groups except for in North Shewa and South Wollo area where there was a conflict between the Fano and the Oromia special zone militia operating in that area. The pattern of the conflict is an ambush tactic with guerrilla-like fighting. Up to now, there has been no publicly known unified structure or command of all the Fano forces.
18. There has been tensions between Amhara and Tigray in the southern Tigray/Raya areas as Tigrayan forces have intervened in the disputed areas. As a result, more than 50,000 people have been displaced to the Amhara region. The situation remains volatile with the government yet to resolve this situation. The concern is that similar incidents may occur in Western Tigray resulting in displacement of many people.
19. There is a tense situation with regard to the issue of Tigrayan refugees from Sudan who may be forced to return to Western Tigray due to the expanding conflict in Sudan; some of these refugees may be perceived to be associated with those who have perpetrated the Mai Kadra massacres against ethnic Amhara. Therefore, there is a risk of intercommunal violence if they return. Western Tigray is currently under Amhara administration and there might follow some changes in the administration of the area. Recently, the Tigrayan forces have been accused of supporting the RSF which they

- vehemently denied. The Sudan conflict is expanding to the East with a high pace, which pushes people to displacement and prompt Ethiopian refugees to prematurely return.
20. There are reports that some Amhara civilians who are perceived to be working with the government forces, or just supporting the government, may risk being attacked by Fano forces. It has happened in the past with target assassinations of local officials in various locations. There are reports of government forces attacking civilians, including by drone strikes. Civilians report being attacked and harassed by both sides if they are perceived to be supporting the other. This double threat puts a lot of pressure on the community because they are requested to support and provide logistical assistance to both sides. Vigilante justice and possibility for people to be arbitrarily accused of supporting either side of the conflict increases in situations like this when there is a general break down of rule of law and there is no accountability.
  21. The government forces are mostly limited to towns and main roads while Fano forces use the rural areas as their ground.
  22. The government has been recently working to return IDPs from Amhara to Oromia. Some IDPs did return, and other have stayed. In the process of trying to return the IDPs, there are reports of attempts to put pressure on the IDPs to agree to the return plan. As a result, there are reports of reduction of access to humanitarian assistance to the IDPs prompting some of them to move onwards to other places. These negative factors that hinder delivery of humanitarian assistance are further compounded by the active conflict and drought happening in some parts of the region.
  23. Even though the situation in the Amhara region is 'worse' for Amhara people because of the active conflict, the situation for ethnic Amhara people outside of Amhara, for example in Addis Ababa, is also 'not very positive'. They are at risk of arbitrary detention by the security forces; there are reports of security forces showing up at night at the houses of ethnic Amhara people conducting searches in their houses. There are reports about ethnic profiling based on information about where people are from. Ethnic Amhara people without valid ID-cards encounter problems in Addis Ababa. There are reports of people being rounded up and placed in detention facilities. There are similarities between how the conflict in the Tigray region has evolved and how the conflict in the Amhara region is evolving with regard to treatment of civilians.
  24. If people, of any origin, are not in possession of a valid ID-card, they may encounter problems and may be a risk of detention. This has happened to refugees who do not have ID-cards. Even though the current ID-cards do not have ethnicity as a category, the cards show place of birth, which indicates ethnicity. People without a proper residence, e.g., day labourers, are also at risk of being interrogated on the streets. In addition to their documents, people from Amhara are also easily identifiable on their language, their accent and their names and some cultural traits.
  25. There is a clear gender dimension of the conflict. Women and children face the worst effects of the war. They are more vulnerable compared to men, and they are exposed to rape and to other serious violations of their rights, including gender-based violence. To what extent gender-based violence has been used systematically as a weapon

should be determined by the relevant human rights organisations. While men are likely to be more targeted because of their perceived affiliation with the combatants, but women may also be subjected to attack and harassment.

### **The situation in the Somali region**

26. Since the peace agreement in 2019 and the absorption of the ONLF into the regional government, the ONLF now participates in the politics of the region, especially under the current leadership of the region. However, there are still reports stating that the situation can be tense. A few security incidents have been reported from some towns as well as a risk of an interference from neighbouring Somalia. The recent bilateral agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland has not been well received by Somalia, which also contributes to the tensions. There are reports of Ethiopians who have been attacked inside Somalia. Overall, the situation can be described as 'fragile, but calm'.
27. As a part of the 2019-agreement, the Liyu police should be dissolved but it is uncertain to which extent the Liyu police has been replaced by other special forces or fully absorbed into the regular forces, or whether they have simply changed the name. It seems as if the Liyu police has morphed into the police force and the prison guard, etc. and are active in the fight against the al-Shabaab in the area.

## Annex 2: Terms of Reference (ToR)

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1. Security situation
  - 1.1. Amhara region
  - 1.2. Tigray region
  - 1.3. Oromo region
  
2. Treatment of persons of actual or perceived association with opposition movements, including ONLF, OLF/OLA, TPLF and Fano
  
3. Treatment of people of Oromos, Amharas, Tigrayans, residents of Ogaden and ethnic Somalis
  
4. Return
  - 4.1. Conditions upon return
  - 4.2. Treatment of persons of actual or perceived association with association with opposition movements upon return