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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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

[21 May 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Incidents targeting the Amhara community

The Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers are deeply concerned by a series of incidents recently targeting the Amhara community in Ethiopia.

The case of journalist Gobeze Sisay from Voice of Amhara

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

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

Gobeze was not brought to court or formally charged during his detention. Under the Ethiopian constitution(1), police must release suspects within 48 hours of their detention or charge them with a crime. This provision of the constitution was violated in his case.

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

On Voice of Amhara, Gobeze recently covered the killing(2) of ethnic Amharas by rebel groups and the challenges(3) faced by those displaced by Ethiopia's civil war. According to Gobeze, he previously worked as a news presenter with the privately owned Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) broadcaster, and as a reporter and documentarian for Yegna TV(4), a privately owned YouTube channel.

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

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

Authorities at the Addis Ababa Police Commission and the City Peace and Security Administration Bureau denied knowledge of his detention, according to reports(5).

Attack in Minjar Shenkora: Who were the aggressors?

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

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

The casualty and damage done by the attackers was managed to be kept at minimum as the local armed civilians were able to mobilize quickly and protect the surroundings.

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

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

The UN should investigate this incident, identify the aggressors and have them prosecuted for their abuses.

OLF militants attack Amhara farmers in North Shewa, Amhara Region

In Attaye, Yifrata, and Gidim Molale of North Shewa, Amhara farmers who had gathered to work at mid-April were shot at and harassed by OLF militants backed by Oromia Prosperity Party.

According to local sources, OLF aggressors started burning houses of Amhara people in a small village called Negesso. Their attacks extended to other towns of Shewa that were not under the protection of regional or federal forces. Civilians were left to defend themselves without any proper armament.

Werabe University students under attack

On April 28, Christian students were attacked and murdered by religious extremists in Werabe, Silte zone. Over 30 Amhara students were severely injured and some are still in life threatening condition; three were murdered on the spot.

On April 5, Werabe University students protested to denounce the religiously motivated attack on Christian students. The peace and security situation of the area remains greatly unstable.

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

Discriminatory access to college in 2022

After much of the infrastructure in the Amhara Region was destroyed by the ongoing war, trauma-stricken Amhara students have been required to sit for the national exam. The Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination (EHEEE) is suspected of deliberately sabotaging test scores.

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

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

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

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

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

Statistics of tests taken from 2016 to 2018 shows the Amhara Region was the top performer compared to other regions in Ethiopia. On average, 67% of students have passed the exam in the Amhara region during the periods shown below.

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

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

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

The concerned students and their families are demanding

for the Minister of Education and the National Educational Assessment and Examination Agency to regrade exams of all students in the Amhara region due to the war conditions;

for the Ethiopian government to investigate the academic inequalities that children of war in Amhara region are currently facing;

for the government to reconsider the college entry cut-off score for students in the immediately affected areas of war, which encompasses Wollo, Shewa, and parts of Gondar.

Human Rights Without Frontiers, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

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

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

(3) <http://wazemradio.com/%e1%8b%a8%e1%8c%8b%e1%8b%9c%e1%8c%a0%e1%8a%9b-%e1%8c%8e%e1%89%a0%e1%8b%9c-%e1%88%b2%e1%88%b3%e1%8b%ad-%e1%88%b5%e1%8b%88%e1%88%ab-%e1%8c%89%e1%8b%b3%e1%8b%ad/>