

About massacres of Amharas in Ethiopia and arrests of Amhara journalists

[CAP Liberté de Conscience](#), along with [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#) and other international NGOs, are very concerned about repeated massacres of Amharas in total impunity in Ethiopia as well as mass arrests by the Ethiopian federal government of Amhara activists, journalists and other critics.

Ethnic cleaning of Amharas in West Wollega zone, Oromia Region: 1500 victims according to the latest statistics

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

According to an article published by The Guardianⁱ on 20 June, 260 to 320 people were horrifically massacred.

According to an AFP press releaseⁱⁱ dated 22 June and published by the African News Agency, the death count surpasses 1500.

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

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

Another witness, who gave only his first name, Shambel, over fears for his safety, said the local Amhara community is now desperately seeking to be relocated somewhere else "before another round of mass killings happen." He said ethnic Amharas that settled in the area about 35 years ago in resettlement programs after the 1984 famine are now being "killed like chickens."

A survivor also declared: "I found myself in a pile of corpses. I looked up and saw a girl, approximately 6 years old, surrounded by six gunmen. She was begging the killers to save her life but in vain. Although I was there, they did

not notice me because they thought I was one of the corpses. They were talking to the girl in Amharic and laughing while she was dying.

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

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

As expected, an OLA spokesman denied the allegations.

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

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

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

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

A new report about the massacres of Ethnic Amharas in Ethiopia

On 27 May 2022, the Amhara Association of America (AAA) published an analytical report about massacres of ethnic Amharas in 2021.

At least 3,308 ethnic Amhara civilians were killed in targeted massacres across Ethiopia between January 1st and December 31st of 2021, according to the report.

More than **7,259 cases of human rights violations** against Amharas are documented in the report. *These include 3,308 killings; 1,252 injuries; 1,009 cases of rape; 111 arbitrary arrests; 62 cases of abduction and forced evictions that impacted at least 1,517 people.*

Compiled through in-person and phone interviews of survivors, their relatives, and eyewitnesses, AAA's annual report paints a grim picture of explicit and systemic human rights violations against the Amhara people. Articles and statements by Ethiopian human rights organizations and media outlets support AAA's ground investigations.

Rebel and armed groups fighting the Ethiopian government were responsible for most civilian casualties (**4,320 civilian casualties including 3,133 killed and 1,165 injured**), according to the AAA. Of these, militias of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) were responsible for 2,490 killings, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) was responsible for 1,688 of the casualties, Gumuz militias for 101, and Sheko militias for 19 casualties. In addition to the thousands of Amhara civilians killed and wounded in attacks by non-state actors and regional security forces, the report documents:

- Government forces were responsible for **86 of the civilian casualties: 37 by the Oromia Special Forces, 46 by the Amhara region security forces, two by ENDF, and one by Benishangul-Gumuz region security forces**. Government forces were responsible for at least 111 arbitrary and unlawful arrest cases during the reporting period: the large majority (107) in the Oromia region and four in the Amhara region.
- The **Addis Ababa City Administration forcibly and violently evicted more than 1,517 ethnic Amhara residents** from their homes in Addis Ababa in brazen disregard of the appropriate legal and procedural safeguards, including prior and adequate consultation, adequate notice, and the provision of compensation and/or alternative housing.
- All documented **rapes (1,009) were committed by TPLF militias** in the Amhara region.
- **OLA accounted for all documented abduction cases (62) recorded in the Oromia (61) and Benishangul Gumuz regions (1)**.
- The remaining casualties were attributed to the Sudan Defense Forces (13), local Oromo youth (3), and unidentified militias (160).

AAA estimates that at **least five million Amharas were forced to flee their homes due to violence throughout 2021** amidst the COVID-19 threat

The full report (268 pages) can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/3nc3ZdW>

Arrests of Amhara journalists Temesgen Desalegn and Yayasew Shimelis

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

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

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

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

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

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

Following Temesgen and Yayesews' arrests, police searched the journalists' homes. In Temesgen's home they confiscated copies of *Feteh* magazine, five hard drives, a camera, a phone, and a flash disk, according to Tariku's Facebook post and Henok. Police confiscated a book and a flash drive from Yayesew's home, according to one of the two people familiar with his case.

In an interview with BBC Amharic a few days before his arrest, Temesgen said that "security sources" had warned him about his impending arrest, according to a report^{xi} by the outlet. When asked if there was anything that might lead to his arrest, Temesgen accused the Ethiopian authorities of "turning into a totalitarian

dictatorship,” saying that they would “suppress the media that could expose [them].”

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

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

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

Recommendations

CAP Liberté de Conscience, along with *Human Rights Without Frontiers* recommend that

- The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia to investigate the aforementioned massacres of Amharas, identify the perpetrators and urge the Ethiopian authorities to prosecute them;
- The Ethiopian government carry out, without delay, its own investigation about the aforementioned massacres of Amharas, identify the perpetrators and prosecute them;
- The Ethiopian government to abide by international standards concerning freedom of the press and the media, and immediately release the arrested Amhara journalists.

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- ii <https://www.africannewsagency.com/news/ethiopia-wollega-massacre-death-count-surpasses-1-500-efa84d6f-5865-5533-a486-378c75449d1e/>
- iii <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/bachelet-urges-prompt-investigation-killings-western-ethiopia>
- iv <https://ethiopiainsider.com/2022/6939/>
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- viii <https://fetehmagazine.com/ሪፖርታጅ/የዘቀዘቀሩት-የጠቅላይ-ሚኒስትሩ-ጀምበር/>
- ix <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/wife-says-ethiopian-general-arrested-after-criticising-government-2022-05-20/>
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- xi <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/news-61591369>
- xii <https://cpj.org/data/people/temesghen-desalegn/>