



## **Active Genocide Alert**

### **Ethiopia - Amhara Region (October Update)**

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention (Lemkin Institute) is issuing an update on its Active Genocide Alert (AGA) for Ethiopia's Amhara region, originally issued on 23 September 2023. *Inter alia*, this update is prompted by the ongoing killings of ethnic Amharas by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), and the Oromia Special Force (OSF), as well as an increase in the use of military drones to attack the civilian population, the ongoing state of emergency in the region, which is being used to silence political opposition, obscure the federal government's actions, and limit daily activities, and the ongoing anti-Amhara sentiment in the Oromia region.

Since 4 August 2023, the Amhara region has been under a state of emergency. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government [announced](#) this measure in response to increased fighting between the ENDF and the non-state armed group known as Fano. One of the most recent elements of the state of emergency has been a total telecommunications blackout across the region which has significantly restricted access to information since its establishment. The Lemkin Institute recalls that Abiy Ahmed's administration [employed](#) this tactic 22 times since 2016 to obscure its actions from international scrutiny.

As a result, the present update draws heavily on information provided, among other sources, by the Amhara Association of America (AAA). While the Lemkin Institute could not independently verify most of the incidents outlined in the following pages due to the aforesaid blackout, the available data, combined with the Ethiopian government's past actions in the Amhara region and elsewhere, as well as the [failure to renew](#) the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) during the 54th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, justifies further analysis of the situation on the ground and increased international pressure on Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's regime.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's ruling Prosperity Party is also using the state of emergency to silence the voices of those advocating for the Amhara outside the region. On the day the state of emergency was declared, numerous journalists and politicians were detained in Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa. Among the [most notable](#) figures taken into custody on 4 August 2023 are Mr. **Christian Tadele**, a member of the House of People's Representatives; Mr. **Yohannes Buayalew**, a member of the Amhara Region Council; and Mr. **Kassa Teshager**, a member of the Addis Ababa City Council. Initially, families were not informed of the whereabouts of these prisoners, nor were they told of the charges against them. On 11 August 2023, the State of Emergency Command Post released a [statement](#) claiming that these individuals were arrested under the suspicion of "carrying out various illegal activities" in cities and "providing logistical and financial support by taking a duty from the armed group." [According to the news outlet "Addis Standard,"](#) the statement reiterated that "the demands of the Amhara people will be answered in a legal and peaceful way through the National Dialogue Commission and following the constitutional system, not by force through illegal means."

However, two separate human rights groups have expressed serious doubts that this is actually the case. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council [argued](#) that due process was violated as police prevented the detainees from appearing in court in Addis Ababa on 21 August 2023. It further noted that the elected positions of Messrs. Muayalew, Teshager and Tadele actually make them immune from prosecution, despite the state of emergency.

According to the [Ethiopia Observer](#), members of the Ethiopian government's own Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) visited the detainees on 1 September 2023 at a detention center in the Afar region, well over 500 km from where they were initially arrested and held. During the visit, the detainees informed the EHRC that they all belonged to the Amhara ethnic group and had experienced ethnic slurs, harassment, and rude and abusive language before and during their transfer from Addis Ababa. Despite police officials' assertions of regular and fair treatment, the EHRC reported that the detainees expressed grievances, stating that their families were unaware of their whereabouts when they arrived at the new detention center. They also described the facility as lacking basic amenities and experiencing extreme temperatures. The EHRC clarified that there were no reports of beatings or physical violence after the detainees were taken into federal police custody.

Meanwhile, in the Amhara region, the state of emergency continues to significantly disrupt daily life and serves as an excuse for bloodshed by the ENDF. [Some universities remain closed](#) and fighting in major population centers has led to [disruption in specialty healthcare services](#) and [hospital closures](#).

On 17 September 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that ENDF personnel shot and killed two civilians, including a fifth-year medical student at Bahir Dar University and a *bajaj* driver, and injured three others on 13 September 2023. These killings occurred in Mekaneselam town, located in the South Wollo Zone, Amhara region, and were carried out on the pretense that the victims were violating curfew.

On 18 September 2023, the EHRC [issued](#) a statement expressing deep concern about its findings in the Amhara and Oromia regions, as well as in Addis Ababa city, which include instances of attacks targeting civilians, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary detentions by state security forces, and called for urgent action.

On 19 September 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that ENDF soldiers killed at least two civilians and injured five others in Kimir Dingaye town of Guna Begemidir *woreda*, situated in the South Gonder Zone, Amhara region, on 18 September 2023. It was also noted that the victims were summarily executed despite the absence of active hostilities in the area, and the killings took place inside homes, churches, and markets. Furthermore, there were reports of civilian casualties and destruction of homes in Nefas Mewcha, located in the Lay Gayint *woreda*.

On the same day, 19 September 2023, it was [reported](#) that the OSF attacked residents of Awra Godana area, also known as Korke town, of the Minjar Shenkora *woreda*, North Shewa Zone, Amhara region, resulting in the deaths of at least 10 civilians and displacing survivors. In addition to the loss of human lives, there were reports of looting and destruction of private property by the regional force. These events were reported to have occurred on 17 September 2023, just one day after the sudden withdrawal of the ENDF and Ethiopian Federal Police from the town, as per the testimony of local officials.

In its report titled “[War on the Amhara: Report on International Human Rights Violations](#),” issued on 21 October 2023, the AAA explained that the ENDF assisted the OSF in its efforts to annex Awra Godana area into the Oromia region. Specifically, the organization stated that, upon learning that local farmers had formed a self-defense force against the OSF, the ENDF provided support using artillery. Furthermore, it was reported that on 18 September 2023, the Oromia Regional Government declared that Awra Godana area now belonged to the Oromia Regional State. On the same day, the Oromo administration was said to have removed the old sign indicating that the area was under the Amhara region administration and replaced it with a new one, which stated that the area was under the jurisdiction of Fentale *woreda* in the East Shewa Zone, Oromia region. The town was then renamed “Korke,” an Afan Oromo name.

Also on the same day, 19 September 2023, drone attacks were [reported](#) in Quarit *woreda* and Dembecha town, located in the West Gojjam Zone, Amhara region, resulting in the deaths of at least 30 and 18 civilians, respectively. The attacks occurred on 17 September 2023 in areas far removed from active hostilities. Eyewitnesses in Dembecha town reported that the attack targeted the area near St. Mikael’s Church. In this regard, the Lemkin Institute recalls that the Ethiopian government previously employed military drones against its civilian population, as in August 2023 when at least 26 civilians were reportedly killed in a drone strike in [Finote Selam town](#), situated in the West Gojjam Zone. Additionally, the ICHREE [reported](#) a series of drone strikes in the Oromia region in October and November 2022, during the re-escalation of fighting between the OLA and the ENDF.

On 20 September 2023, the AAA [reported](#) mobile network and telecommunications blackouts across the Amhara region. As rightly noted in the ICHREE's [report](#), the intentional disruption of essential services, including telecommunications, is a recurrent element in the execution of atrocity crimes by the national government against the civilian population. Frequently framed as national security imperatives, telecommunications disruptions have the underlying purpose of limiting or outright blocking the recollection and dissemination of evidence related to the commission of atrocity crimes. As of the time of publication of this AGA, [the Amhara region is still without internet services](#), making their restoration an urgent necessity.

On 25 September 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that seven civilians were extrajudicially executed in Ashifa *kebele* of Sekela *woreda*, situated in the West Gojjam Zone, Amhara region. These executions were reported to have been carried out by ENDF soldiers on 30 August 2023. The following day, the same organization [reported](#) that ENDF soldiers extrajudicially executed at least six civilians and injured three others in Dangila town, situated in the Awi Zone, Amhara region. The attack was reported to have taken place on 21 September 2023 and was executed in retaliation for an attack by Fano in Mecha *woreda*, located in the West Gojjam Zone.

On 2 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) the extrajudicial killings of nine farmers in Chinchaye *kebele* of Gonder Zuriya *woreda*, situated in the Central Gonder Zone, Amhara region. These farmers were reported to have been under the custody of the ENDF prior to their deaths on 26 September 2023. Additionally, the AAA explained that a 12-year-old girl, whose identity was not mentioned, was reported missing after the incident.

The next day, the AAA [reported](#) the assassination of Mr. **Tesfa Bizualem** on 22 September 2023 in Gindewoin town, which is situated in the Goncha-Siso-Enese *woreda* of East Gojjam Zone, Amhara region. Mr. Bizualem, a retired civil servant, was reportedly shot dead near his house by government forces.

On 4 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) the targeting of ethnic Amhara residents in the Arusi and Lomicha *kebeles*, located in the Abe Dongoro *woreda* of the Horo Guduru Wollega Zone, Oromia region. The attack was reported to have begun on the morning of 3 October 2023 and to have been executed by ENDF forces and allied Oromo militias. As of 4 October, the attack had reportedly resulted in the deaths of three civilians and injuries to an additional ten.

On 6 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that OLA personnel killed at least 23 Amhara civilians and injured an additional five on 2 October 2023 in various zones of Dera *woreda*, situated in the North Shewa Zone, Oromia region. It was claimed that these attacks were launched late at night in Qoro-Ginde-Berbere, Degnu, Salayish, Selekula, and Cheqa. In addition to the loss of human lives, a large number of heads of cattle and other properties were reported to have been looted by OLA forces, as well as the destruction of more than 50 residential houses. The AAA also indicated that the OLA was backed by government security officials.

At least three drone strikes were [reported](#) by the AAA on 7 October 2023. The attacks, which occurred the day before, resulted in the death of at least 30 people in Abe Dongoro *woreda* of

Horo Guduru Wollega Zone, Oromia region. Moreover, the organization reported that at least one of the attacks struck a group of unarmed civilians that were gathered and preparing food.

On 9 October 2023, the AAA [uploaded](#) a video to the social platform “X”, formerly known as “Twitter”, depicting a large crowd during *Irreecha* celebrations chanting anti-Fano and what could be interpreted as anti-Amhara slogans. According to the translation, the participants can be heard shouting: “Fano are murderers!”; “Fano are terrorists!”; “To those of you Amharas living in Oromia, if you do not condemn the actions of Fano, Eskinder Nega and Zemene Kassie, we will finish you all!”; “Addis Ababa belongs to the Oromo people!”; “Therefore, to you Amhara people that live in Adama (Nazreth), Sebeta, Burayu, Sululta, and Bishoftu (Debre Ziet) think for yourselves!”

Although the Lemkin Institute unequivocally does not endorse the actions of the armed group known as Fano, it is concerned about the utilization of genocidal language and rhetoric which attempts to equate the Amhara ethnic group with the Fano. Considering the ethnic component of the armed group’s membership, the Lemkin Institute believes that the escalation of verbal harassment points to an imminent increase in inter-ethnic violence. The Lemkin Institute also believes that dehumanization speech-acts, particularly those that construct the target group as animals (bestialization), diseases (biologicalization), or “less-than-human”, as well as criminalization speech-acts, especially when associated with supposed inherent traits of the group in question, are essential elements in the processes of genocide.

On 10 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that ENDF forces summarily executed at least eight civilians in Tilili town, located in the Awi Zone, Amhara region, on 4 October 2023. The next day, the organization [reported](#) two separate incidents where OLA forces purportedly abducted approximately 60 Amhara civilians in the North Shewa Zone of the Oromia region. The first incident was reported to have occurred on 10 October 2023, when seven trucks were stopped by OLA forces in an area called Wogem, situated in Abote *woreda*. The second incident took place on 11 October 2023, when OLA personnel attacked a public transport that was traveling from Cheqa to Gundo-Meskel. This attack was reported to have been executed in the morning at a place called Wegdi, situated in Dera *woreda*.

On 13 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that ENDF forces summarily executed three civilians in Shewa Robit town, located in the North Shewa Zone, Amhara region. The executions were reported to have been perpetrated on 11 October 2023 in Shewa Robit Prison Center, after the victims were tortured for more than 30 days after their arrest.

Two additional drone strikes were [reported](#) by the AAA on 16 October 2023. The strikes took place on the same day in Berehet *woreda*, situated in the North Shewa Zone, Amhara region, and resulted in approximately 35 deaths and injuries to an additional 27. The first drone strike was reported to have been executed in the morning and to have targeted the police station of the *woreda*, which is located in Metebila town. Around noon, a second drone strike struck the center of four *kebeles* of the *woreda*, hitting a vehicle carrying civilians fleeing the town and

children who were near. Among the dead, the AAA identified seven civilians under the age of 19, as well as a 40-year-old mother with her two-year-old child.

On 17 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that ENDF personnel executed at least 12 civilians in the Gubala, Shulta, and Milkata *kebeles* of Banja *woreda*, situated in the Awi Zone, Amhara region, on 7 October 2023.

On 19 October 2023, the organization [reported](#) that ENDF forces killed at least 20 civilians in the Durbete and Wetet-Abay areas of the South Achefer *woreda*, situated in the North Gojjam Zone, Amhara region. These killings occurred in the context of active fighting that took place on 1 October 2023, either by execution or artillery strikes. Additionally, the AAA reported at least four cases of gang rape in Sebatamit, which is located on the outskirts of Bahir Dar city. These crimes were reported to have been committed on 9 October 2023, following the heavy fighting that took place that day between government forces and the Fano.

On 21 October 2023, the Amhara Professionals Union [published](#) an appeal to stop the use of chemical weapons against the Amharas. The organization mentioned that it had “[...] has received credible evidence from multiple sources *about shipments of chemical warfare agents from Saudi Arabia to Dire Dawa city, Ethiopia, in numerous rounds of Antonov aircraft flights. Eyewitnesses with detailed evidence indicate the transfer of some of these chemical agents via military helicopters to Bahir Dar city, the capital of the Amhara Region of Ethiopia.* Additionally, several C17 Globemaster McDonnell Douglas flights from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have delivered military supplies to Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa city, the federal capital of Ethiopia.” (Emphasis added).

While the Lemkin Institute was unable to independently verify these allegations, their gravity justifies the following remarks. The prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, stipulated in Article I of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), applies in all circumstances, and is binding on both Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia since their respective ratification on 13 May 1996 and 9 August 1996. Moreover, international jurisprudence has confirmed the customary status of this prohibition in both international and non-international armed conflicts.

Additionally, the Lemkin Institute wishes to recall Ethiopia’s previous [statements](#) advocating for the complete ban and destruction of such weapons as “a matter of the utmost priority” and its commitment to “[...] creating a world free of chemical weapons.”

Given that states often deny allegations of chemical weapons use, the Lemkin Institute urges the international community to take the Amhara Professionals Union’s concerns seriously and to conduct a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation into the situation in the Amhara region, especially if innocent civilians could be potential victims of a chemical attack.

If these allegations were confirmed to be true, the Lemkin Institute also reminds Saudi Arabia of its obligations under Article I of the CWC, namely “Each State Party to this Convention undertakes never under any circumstances: (a) To develop, produce, otherwise acquire,

stockpile or retain chemical weapons, *or transfer, directly or indirectly, chemical weapons to anyone; [...]*.” (Emphasis added).

In this context, the Lemkin Institute also wishes to recall Saudi Arabia’s previous [statements](#) on chemical weapons, which not only supported a total prohibition on the use and production of these weapons, but also their destruction and stockpiling.

In addition to the aforementioned incidents, the AAA reported other violations committed by the ENDF and OLA in the context of the non-international armed conflict in its [report](#) issued on 21 October 2023. According to its findings, the organization reported at least 807 civilians casualties, including women, children, elderly persons, and individuals *hors de combat*, while 634 more were injured and at least 3 women were raped and sexually assaulted in the Amhara and Oromia regions between 3 August and 3 October 2023.

On 22 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that ENDF personnel killed three civilians, forcefully disappeared five, and detained an additional 16 in Denkez *kebele* of Gonder Zuriya *woreda*, located in the Central Gonder Zone, Amhara region. According to the organization, the attack occurred on 12 October 2023 and targeted farmers and their property, which were situated far away from hostilities. Among those forcefully disappeared, the AAA reported an unidentified woman and her child. Although it mentioned that the whereabouts of all disappeared persons remained unknown at the time of publication, the organization explained that the 16 detained individuals were being held at Maksegnit Clinic, located in its namesake town.

On 27 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that ENDF soldiers summarily executed four farmers in Sefi Beret *kebele* of Kewet *woreda*, situated in the North Shewa Zone, Amhara region. The events occurred the day before and resulted in the deaths of a man and his son, as well as two brothers who were returning home from their farm. Additionally, the organization stated that victims were tortured by the ENDF prior to their execution.

On 31 October 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that ENDF personnel killed four civilians and injured another in two separate incidents in Kobo city, located in the Raya Kobo *woreda* of the North Wollo Zone, Amhara region. The first incident was reported to have occurred on 26 October 2023, when ENDF soldiers asked a *bajaj* driver, who was driving a nurse to her workplace, to provide them with taxi services. When the driver attempted to explain that the *bajaj* was full, the soldiers reportedly killed both the driver and the nurse. The second incident took place on 29 October 2023, when state riot police members allegedly killed two civilians inside another *bajaj* and injured a third victim.

On 1 November 2023, the AAA [reported](#) that the OLA invaded the Yeju *kebele* of Were-Jarso *woreda*, located in the North Shewa Zone, Oromia region. The attack occurred the day before and targeted the local Amhara residents, resulting in the deaths of approximately 11 civilians, five of whom belonged to the same family. Additionally, the organization reported injuries to three civilians, along with incidents of looting and destruction of property, including the theft

of heads of cattle and the burning of residential houses. According to AAA's sources, federal security forces reached the area after the OLA had left.

Despite the Ethiopian government not addressing the situation in the Amhara region in recent weeks, the EHRC released a new [press statement](#) on 30 October 2023 detailing many patterns of violence mentioned both above and in the Lemkin Institute's last AGA, including the use of heavy weapons and associated civilian casualties, instances of forced displacement, looting and destruction of property and extrajudicial killings. Furthermore, the EHRC mentioned that many schools in the region are now being used as military facilities or housing for internally displaced people (IDP), leaving numerous children unable to receive formal education since the beginning of hostilities in April 2023. Disturbingly, the EHRC also [found](#) that over 200 victims of sexual abuse have registered with health facilities in the Amhara region, including IDPs and healthcare workers.

The Lemkin Institute categorically condemns the international community's indifference to the ongoing commission of atrocity crimes, not only in the Amhara region but throughout the country. As noted above, the mandate of the sole remaining international mechanism, the ICHREE, expired in October 2023. Steven Ratner, one of the three experts that comprised the ICHREE, lamented the Commission's dissolution: "In our report and our oral statement to the [Human Rights] Council we made it clear that it was their responsibility, as an organ created to prevent human rights abuses and respond to them, to ensure continued international oversight," he [told](#) the publication Justice Info. "Our report is not just a record of past events but an account of ongoing concerns, and frankly a prediction of more atrocities to come." The Lemkin Institute shares Mr. Ratner's concerns about the human rights situation in Ethiopia in the foreseeable future, which continues to bear the hallmarks of future atrocity crimes.

Although key players such as the United States and the European Union have expressed their desire for a "[unified, peaceful, and prosperous Ethiopia](#)," their actual commitment to ensuring accountability and justice in the conflict-stricken nation through the presence of international observers seems lacking. This manifest lack of interest is further corroborated by the inaction of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, which prematurely [terminated](#) the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on the Situation in the Tigray Region in May 2023, as noted in the Lemkin Institute's [AGA](#) for the Tigray region.

The Lemkin Institute thus exhorts the international community, in particular international and regional organizations, to expeditiously establish an international oversight entity. This entity should investigate the well-substantiated commission of atrocity crimes by federal forces and their national and foreign allies; collect, classify, and preserve evidence in support of accountability efforts; and initiate a meaningful transitional justice process in Ethiopia.

Finally, the Lemkin Institute reaffirms the plea outlined in its "[Statement in Support on an International Investigation of Abiy Ahmed's Crimes in Ethiopia](#)," issued on 3 February 2023, which called "[...] on the international community to refer [Abiy Ahmed's] crimes to the ICC for investigation."