



Lemkin Institute Statement on the Ongoing Violence Against the Amhara People

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention wishes to call attention to ongoing violence against the Amhara people in Ethiopia. More than 200 Amhara were massacred in Ethiopia's Oromia region this past Sunday, June 19, 2022. This is just the most recent example of targeted killings, rapes, and destruction of property that the Amhara people have experienced since the start of the current civil war.

The persecution of Amharas has been neglected by the international community, which has focused largely on the genocidal violence against the people of Tigray perpetrated by the Ethiopian government with the help of Eritrean forces. The Amhara, when discussed at all, are generally accused of being responsible for violence against the people of Tigray. Ongoing violence targeting Amhara people and the Amhara identity is largely ignored. However, within this larger conflict between the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan forces, the Amhara have been targeted by all sides with violence that amounts to crimes against humanity, and, arguably, genocide.

In calling attention to the little reported suffering of the Amhara, we wish to highlight the importance of accountability for genocidal policies and genocidal crimes that have marred Ethiopia's history over the past half century. These policies and past crimes are helping to fuel brutal inter-ethnic violence and are eroding opportunities to create a united Ethiopia, where each identity can coexist in harmony.

Ethiopia has over ninety different ethnic groups and a high level of intermarriage between groups. The Amhara are one of the oldest peoples inhabiting Ethiopia and make up around a quarter of the total population. They are primarily concentrated in the Amhara region in northwest Ethiopia. The majority of Amhara are small farmers; they are the most significant producers of agricultural products to feed the Ethiopian population.

The Amhara have been persecuted for several decades. Recent mass atrocities targeting them are an amplification of longer-standing patterns. Mass crimes against the Amhara people began in the 1990s, but their ideological justification dates back to the 1970s. In the 1970s ethnonationalist groups that opposed both the autocratic imperial state led by Emperor Haile Selassie, who was Amhara, and the brutal Derg military dictatorship that replaced him, began to demonize the Amhara people as cosmic enemies. This effort was led by the ethnonationalist Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), who sought to dismantle the

older imperial policies of pan-Ethiopian nationalism that they felt privileged Amhara people and Amhara culture over Ethiopia's other groups, particularly Tigrayans and Oromos.

When the TPLF came to power as the leaders of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991, one of its first initiatives was the rewriting of the Ethiopian constitution along ethnic lines, instituting a policy of territorially-based 'ethnic federalism'. This constitution increased ethnic divisions as political parties became predominantly ethnically-oriented. Also, regions that could be claimed to be dominated by only one ethnic group had the right to self-determination and secession, which has encouraged ethnic cleansing and other forms of demographic engineering. The constitution expanded the territory claimed by the TPLF at the expense of Amharas and other ethnic groups.

During TPLF rule (1991-2018) Amhara people suffered numerous individual and collective human rights violations, some of which could amount to the crime of genocide. TPLF policy towards the Amhara was characterized by systematic cultural and identity destruction. Crimes include mass killings and summary executions, abduction of children, forced disappearances, widespread rape and other sexual violence, systematic demographic "engineering" (including sterilization and forced inter-marriage), land annexation (that is, incorporating parts of the Amhara region into the Tigray region), the ethnic cleansing of Amhara in the incorporated regions, enslavement, arbitrary arrests and tortures, abuse of rights to property, the prohibition against speaking and learning in Amharic, the assassination of Amhara intellectuals, and the numerical disappearance of hundreds of thousands of persons of Amhara ethnicity from the census. The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) also participated in these crimes.

Since 2018, when the Oromo-backed Prosperity Party came into power (led by 2019 Nobel Prize laureate Abiy Ahmed Ali), the Amhara people have continued to suffer severely, and their fundamental human rights have been heavily violated. Abiy's government amnestied previously exiled OLA members. The atrocity crimes committed against the Amhara people since 2018 include mass killings and summary executions, ethnic cleansing, abduction of children, forced disappearances, measures intended to prevent births, the forcible transfer of children of the group to another group, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and looting.

These crimes were organized by the TPLF, the OLA, the Oromo Special Forces, Gumuz militants, and Sudanese militias. They were carried out in nearly all regions of Ethiopia (Oromia, Tigray, Benishangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, Afar, and Amhara), but most severely between the two regions of Amhara and Tigray.

Taking into account the scale and organization of these criminal acts, it can safely be said that this is a case of systematic violations of international criminal law, international human rights law, and international humanitarian law.

Shining a light on the intentional destruction of the Amhara people as such is required if the world is going to stop long-standing patterns of identity destruction in Ethiopia. While the people of Tigray are also suffering a probable genocide at the hands of Ethiopian (and, previously, allied Eritrean) forces, the international community must resist reporting on these crimes in a vacuum. Violence in Ethiopia's different regions is deeply intertwined and must be viewed historically. As

we know from previous instances of genocide, genocidal violence against one group is profoundly destabilizing, both nationally and regionally, and tends to lead to genocidal violence against other groups, either by the same group of perpetrators, by people victimized by genocide, or by new actors taking advantage of the climate of cruelty and impunity. These ongoing patterns require broader frameworks in order for them to be understood and addressed.

Given the complexities of the different yet intertwined conflicts in Ethiopia, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention underscores the need for a robust and independent investigation of atrocity crimes. We call on Ethiopian authorities to allow full access by the inquiry team established by the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva in December 2021. We encourage investigators to consider the particular history of coordinated persecution faced by different populations/ethnic groups, including the Amhara, and how these histories have played out during the recent conflict between the Ethiopian government and Tigray forces. We believe that a lasting peace in Ethiopia, as elsewhere, will require a difficult accounting with the recent and more distant past in which the entire population of the country is involved.