

# Ethiopia 2024 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

While a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed in late 2022 between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front continued to largely hold, the Amhara and Oromia regions experienced conflict between government forces and Amhara Fano militia forces and the Oromo Liberation Army, respectively. From August 2023 through June 4, a state of emergency was in effect under which there were reports of widespread government violations of human rights, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions. Reports of conflict-related human rights abuses in the Amhara and Oromia regions continued through the year, even after the state of emergency expired, and despite the initial state of emergency decree containing language specific to the Amhara Region. In addition, there was a crackdown on fundamental freedoms of speech and peaceful assembly throughout the country, with numerous reports of intimidation and restrictions on journalists, civil society members, human rights defenders, and opposition members, as well as several suspensions of independent human rights organizations.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; transnational

repression against individuals in another country; serious abuses in a conflict; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests of journalists and censorship.

The government took limited steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses. The government stated it prosecuted some lower-level officers for abuses, but details were scant.

There were reports of widespread killings of civilians, mass forced displacement, ethnic cleansing, rape and other forms of violence against women and girls, looting, and destruction of property by Amhara militias and affiliated groups in western Tigray. There were also reports of widespread unlawful killings of civilians and government officials in the Amhara and Oromia regions and elsewhere, including by the Oromo Liberation Army and Amhara Fano militia. Local militia groups in the Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Gambella, and Somali regions reportedly carried out attacks and killings of civilians, displacing thousands. The government reportedly engaged in dialogue with some groups and prosecuted some nonstate actors.

## Section 1. Life

### a. Extrajudicial Killings

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), and the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) reported numerous cases of unlawful or extrajudicial killings within the context of continued conflicts in Amhara and Oromia regions and other parts of the country, including Tigray. HRW documented several cases of executions of detainees.

There were numerous instances when the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and regional police forces reportedly used excessive lethal force against civilians within the context of conflict. On February 13, a Reuters investigative report revealed the Oromia Regional Government's Koree Nageenya (Security Committee in the Afaan Oromoo language) committed widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detentions, particularly targeting ethnic and religious minorities and political opponents.

On April 9, unknown assailants killed Bate Urgessa, a prominent opposition politician, in Meki town, Oromia Region. The EHRC called for an independent investigation into the killing, emphasizing the need for accountability and justice, but there was no public release of the

investigation as of year's end.

## **b. Coercion in Population Control**

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

## **c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-Related Abuses**

In 2022, the government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA), ending active hostilities, which continued to hold throughout the year, although reports of abuses by Eritrean troops along the border and by militia groups persisted. In March 2023, the U.S. Secretary of State "determined members of the ENDF, Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), TPLF forces, and Amhara forces committed war crimes during the conflict in northern Ethiopia. Members of the ENDF, EDF, and Amhara forces also committed crimes against humanity, including killings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and abuses. Members of the Amhara forces also committed the crime against humanity of deportation or forcible transfer and committed ethnic cleansing in western Tigray."

During the year, the Amhara and Oromia regions experienced conflict

between government forces and Fano militia and the OLA, respectively.

In August 2023, the government imposed a state of emergency related to conflict in the Amhara Region that applied nationwide, under which numerous abuses were reported. Despite the expiration of the emergency decree on June 4, abuses continued in both Amhara and Oromia regions.

During the year, government counterinsurgency campaigns against the Fano militia in Amhara Region, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Oromia Region, and militias in the Benishangul-Gumuz, Central Ethiopia, and Gambella regions continued, with numerous reports of unlawful killings, including killings of civilians. In addition, there were reports of extrajudicial killings by the EDF and regional militia in the Tigray Region, as well as reports of killings of civilians by other militia groups.

According to the OHCHR, from January 2023 to January, at least 1,351 civilians were killed in the country due to attacks by government forces, Eritrean troops, antigovernment militias, and unknown actors. Of these, 740 civilians were killed in the Amhara Region. The use of unmanned aerial vehicles by government forces resulted in 248 civilian deaths between August 4 and December 31, 2023, and destroyed vital infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and water infrastructure, according to the OHCHR update. Between November 2023 and April, the EHRC documented numerous instances of unlawful and arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings by government forces in conflict-affected areas of North, West, and

East Gojjam zones, as well as Bahir Dar and nearby areas, South Gondar, North Shewa and Oromia Special Zone of Amhara Region. Similar incidents were reported in North, South, West, Southwest, and East Shewa zones, Horo Gudru Wollega, West Guji Zone, and West Arsi Zone in Oromia Region.

On January 29, at least 89 civilians were killed by government troops in Merawi town near Bahir Dar, Amhara Region, according to media reports.

On April 12, Amnesty International released its investigation into this incident, which followed clashes between Amhara Fano militia and the ENDF. The report corroborated eyewitness accounts with satellite imagery to conclude ENDF soldiers rounded up residents from their homes, shops, and the streets, and summarily executed more than 50 individuals. Both Amnesty International and HRW criticized the government's lack of credible efforts to provide justice and prevent such atrocities.

On May 12, Deutsche Welle (DW) Amharic reported two drone strikes in the North Shewa zone of the Amhara Region's Kewet and Molale districts killed at least 10 civilians. An eyewitness in Kewet District stated a drone strike hit a school, resulting in the death of seven schoolteachers who had gathered for holiday festivities on the school compound. Another witness from Molale District reported a drone strike on the same day attacked a residential house, killing three civilians along with three Fano members. The EHRC announced it was investigating the incident.

On June 15, the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD)

reported in Oromia Region, a member of the ENDF raped a woman, age 18, and subsequently shot her to prevent her from reporting the incident in the region's Bule Hora District. The soldiers also threatened her entire family and killed her father. In Oromia Region, media reported the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and government authorities blamed the OLA for killing four monks at the Ziquala Monastery in East Shewa Zone, while political opposition groups accused government security services of the killings.

The OHCHR recorded 594 incidents of human rights abuses affecting 8,253 victims, with government actors responsible for 70 percent of the abuses.

On July 3, HRW released a report titled, *If the Soldier Dies, It's on You: Attacks on Medical Care in Ethiopia's Amhara*, highlighting government security forces' abuses. These forces, which included the ENDF and government militias, deliberately deprived the civilian population of essential items such as food, drinking water, and medical aid, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, according to the report. The report documented instances where humanitarian access was denied, and where humanitarian workers were attacked, further hindering relief efforts. Deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian property, including schools and health-care facilities, continued, causing widespread fear and disruption, according to the report.

Between August 2023 and May, HRW conducted 58 interviews with victims, witnesses, health professionals, and aid workers. Specific incidents

highlighted the severity of the situation. For example, in December 2023, an apparent drone strike targeted an ambulance in the South Wollo Zone, killing the driver and a patient. In another instance, hospitals in the South Gonder Zone were repeatedly raided by government forces searching for patients with gunshot or trauma wounds, whom they suspected of being affiliated with Fano fighters. These raids led to wrongful arrests and the destruction of medical supplies. The report also noted the continued hostilities disrupted the delivery of medical supplies, leading to acute shortages in hospitals and health-care centers. This severely affected these facilities' ability to provide adequate care.

On February 29, Refugees International reported despite the COHA, the situation in Tigray remained dire, with deliberate deprivation of essential items such as food, drinking water, and medical aid severely impacting the civilian population. According to the report, Eritrean troops, Amhara forces, and others had not fully withdrawn from parts of Tigray and at times denied humanitarian access, and there were reports of attacks against humanitarian workers, further complicating relief efforts. Civilians and civilian properties, including schools and health-care facilities, were deliberately targeted.

Many families resorted to desperate measures, such as feeding their children cattle roots feed or forcing them to sleep longer to stave off hunger pains. The Tigray Bureau of Health reported 60 percent of households were



experiencing moderate or severe hunger, a rate even higher than during the 2020-2022 war.

## Section 2. Liberty

### a. Freedom of the Press

The constitution and law provided for freedom of speech, including for members of the press and other media. The government's respect for this right deteriorated, especially in response to the conflicts in Amhara and Oromia regions. International organizations including the International Federation of Journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders, and Freedom House reported a further decline in press freedom.

In July 2023, CARD commissioned a study entitled *Media Space and the State of Media Associations*, which found an increasingly narrowing media space in the country. The study stated, "Owing to the environment of conflict, access to information has increasingly become challenging; harassment and arbitrary detention of journalists has become a common practice; and mobility of journalists has been curtailed."

During the year, the government restricted criticism, especially regarding internal conflicts, including through art works.

On May 25, the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC) reported

on the “dire situation” regarding freedom of expression due to armed conflict and the imposition of the August 2023 state of emergency. The EHRDC reported human rights defenders faced severe limitations, including internet shutdowns and restrictions on public gatherings, which impeded their ability to communicate, mobilize, and advocate for human rights. The EHRDC further reported the government’s crackdown extended to artistic expression, particularly targeting art nights and theaters that featured political or social satire. For instance, on January 11, the solo theater performance *Eyayu Fengus Boletika* was banned for reportedly criticizing the government. The organizers announced on social media that they had to postpone the event indefinitely due to last-minute instructions from the Addis Ababa Administration Peace and Security Office requiring “permission to organize and assemble.”

On June 6, Voice of America (VOA) Amharic reported the Ethiopian Federal Police (EFP) accused three artists of terrorism and plotting a violent overthrow of the government after banning their politically themed theater performance. The EFP alleged the artists, along with 17 others, incited violence through social media and provided logistical support to a terrorist group. The artists involved were Amanuel Habtamu, a performance artist, Dagmawi Feyisa, a theater producer, and Filagot Abraham, who gained attention for her artwork depicting a bullet wound on her head and barbed wire on her mouth at a public event. On June 20, the Federal First Instance Court granted bail to the three artists, ordering their release upon payment

of 50,000 birr (\$634) bail each.

## **Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure**

Journalists reportedly feared reprisals, as many journalists were killed under unclear circumstances. Many reporters whose coverage did not support the government narrative were detained on serious charges such as “promoting terrorism and extremism.” For example, according to the publication *The Reporter*, on August 12, State Minister of Mines Muhamadrafi Abaraya told investigative journalist Ashenafi Endale to stop reporting on mining as “mining has become a national security issue.” This decision followed investigative reports by *The Reporter* exposing corruption and its ties to armed conflict in the mining sector.

The government harassed and detained foreign journalists. For example, on February 22, security officers detained French journalist Antoine Galindo while he was interviewing Bate Urgessa, a political officer with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) who was killed on April 9.

On June 18, the CPJ reported Belay Manaye, founder of the YouTube channel *Ethio News* who was arrested in November 2023 and detained at the Awash Arba military camp, was released. Belay and his cohost Belete Kassa reported on the conflict between federal forces and the Fano militia in the Amhara Region. The report noted at least 54 Ethiopian journalists went into exile since 2020, with the CPJ providing emergency assistance to 30 of

them. Journalists like Guyo Wariyo and Tesfa-Alem Tekle faced continued threats and harassment even after fleeing the country, according to the CPJ.

### **Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups**

While independent media were active, reports of harassment, intimidation, and other restrictions of journalists critical of the government – especially its response to internal conflicts – were widespread. The Ethiopian Media Authority restricted some freedom of expression for members of the press and the press frequently practiced self-censorship.

The government charged some journalists, critics, and artists on national security grounds.

On April 14, the Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Association (EMMPA) raised concerns on the prolonged imprisonment of journalists in Addis Ababa and called for their release. According to the EMMPA, despite repeated bail rights granted by courts to journalists such as Dawit Begashaw and Genet Asmamaw, Ethiopian Federal Police refused to respect court orders, alleging the journalists committed “terrorism-related crimes” while citing their journalistic work as evidence for the admission of the crime.

The government’s outsized influence on the telecommunications sector – through state-owned EthioTelecom – enabled it to control the online media space by leveraging nationwide and regional shutdowns.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The constitution and law provided workers, except for civil servants and certain categories of workers primarily in the public sector, with the right to form and join unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. Other provisions and laws, however, severely restricted these rights. The law specifically prohibited managerial employees, teachers, health-care workers, judges, prosecutors, security-service workers, domestic workers, and seasonal agricultural workers from organizing unions. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and required employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination to reinstate workers dismissed for union activities.

While the law recognized the right to collective bargaining, this right was severely restricted under the law. Negotiations aimed at amending or replacing a collectively bargained agreement had to take place within three months of its expiration; otherwise, the prior provisions on wages and other benefits ceased to apply. The law restricted enterprise unions to negotiating wages only at the plant level.

Lawsuits alleging unlawful dismissal often took years to resolve because of case backlogs in the courts. Labor officials reported high unemployment, fear of retribution, and long delays in hearing labor cases, which deterred workers from participating in strikes and other labor actions.

In August, the EHRCO reported the application of the law providing workers the right to form and join unions was inconsistent. Many workers were often unaware of their rights or faced significant barriers in organizing. This lack of effective representation left workers vulnerable to exploitation and limited their ability to negotiate better working conditions, the EHRCO assessed.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

There was no national minimum wage. Some government institutions and public enterprises set their own minimum wages. Public-sector employees, the largest group of wage earners, earned a monthly minimum wage that was above the poverty line. Workers in the country's industrial parks earned wages below the poverty line and reported working longer hours than the legal maximum. During the year, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions urged the government to establish a national minimum wage, increase civil servant salaries, and grant civil servants the right to unionize.

The law provided for a 48-hour maximum legal workweek with a 24-hour

rest period, premium pay for overtime, and prohibition of excessive compulsory overtime. Four conditions allowed employers to make use of overtime work: urgency of the task, danger, absence of an employee, and lack of alternatives. Additionally, employers could not engage their employees in overtime work exceeding two hours per day, 20 hours per month, and 100 hours per year. The law entitled employees in public enterprises and government financial institutions to overtime pay; civil servants received compensatory time off for overtime work. Most employees in the formal sector worked a 39-hour workweek, but only a small percentage of the population, concentrated in urban areas, was involved in wage-labor employment.

The EHRCO documented many industrial parks and factories failed to provide adequate working conditions. Workers often faced poor working environments with insufficient wages to meet basic living standards. The absence of a standardized minimum wage exacerbated this problem, as employers often set wages arbitrarily, leading to significant disparities and economic hardship for workers. On June 26, the International Labor Organization (ILO) stated low wages were a major factor behind the country's high worker turnover rates.

## **Occupational Safety and Health**

The government, industries, and unions negotiated occupational safety and health (OSH) standards, which did not fully address worker safety in many

industries. Human rights organizations and labor unions lamented the lack of attention given to OSH standards, particularly in the construction sector. The government neither proactively identified unsafe conditions nor addressed workers' and their unions' complaints. Many workers specifically excluded by law from unionizing, including domestic workers and seasonal agricultural workers, reportedly did not benefit from health and safety regulations in the workplace and were often unable to remove themselves from endangerment without jeopardizing their employment. The Labor Ministry lacked detailed, sector-specific health and safety guidelines.

Hazardous working conditions existed in the agricultural sector, which was the primary base of the country's economy. There were also reports of hazardous and exploitative working conditions in the construction and industrial sectors, although data on deaths and injuries were not available.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

Overall, the government did not effectively enforce wage laws. Penalties were not commensurate with those for comparable violations of similar laws. The Labor Ministry's inspection department was responsible for enforcement of workplace standards. OSH measures were not effectively enforced. The ministry carried out some regular labor inspections to monitor compliance, but the government had an insufficient number of labor inspectors to enforce the law and did not effectively record or track violations. Labor inspectors had the authority to make unannounced



inspections and initiate sanctions but remained understaffed.

The World Bank and the *National Employment Policy and Strategy of Ethiopia* reported the informal sector included more than 70 percent of urban workers. Although labor laws covered informal sector workers, the government did little to enforce the law in this sector.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

There were reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

During the year, the EHRC and local media reported numerous cases of enforced disappearances of prominent figures critical of the government, including political commentators, former military officers, investigative journalists, and social media activists.

On July 5, the EHRC released its *Annual Ethiopia Human Rights Situation Report (June 2023 – June 2024)* highlighting multiple cases of enforced disappearances and the detention of persons in informal detention facilities, especially in conflict-affected areas of the country. The report highlighted that agents of the government or groups acting with the government's authorization, support, or acquiescence were involved in keeping civilians in informal detention centers. The report added authorities refused to

acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or concealed the fate or whereabouts of these persons.

In Tigray, the EHRC annual report highlighted continued enforced disappearances, despite a reduction in enforced disappearance following the COHA. The report documented several cases where individuals were abducted by government agents or groups acting with government authorization, support, or acquiescence. These individuals were subsequently held in undisclosed locations, with authorities refusing to acknowledge their detention or reveal their whereabouts. On August 14, *Ethiopia Insider* reported Habtamu Belayneh, a dual member of the House of Federation and the Amhara Regional Council, was released August 13 from being forcibly disappeared for six months. On March 1, unidentified individuals took Habtamu from the Arat Kilo area of Addis Ababa and his whereabouts remained unknown until his release. The EHRC's May 28 statement highlighted two cases involving the Oromia Regional Police.

Government actors reportedly abducted politicians, journalists, activists, artists, and others who criticized its security operations and the humanitarian situation resulting from conflict. Thousands of Tigrayans were reportedly arbitrarily detained in western Tigray at unknown locations. In August, *Addis Standard*, BBC Amharic, and other local media reported rising occurrences of kidnapping in Amhara Region. On September 2, the abduction and killing of a girl, age two, sparked a public protest in Gondar to

which security forces responded, resulting in the deaths of at least five persons. The city's Communication Bureau described the crime wave as part of a "deliberately planned agenda by enemy forces." The EHRC revealed a range of actors, including government security forces, organized criminal groups, and armed forces, were involved in the abductions.

Eritrean forces reportedly continued to abduct Tigrayans in northern Ethiopia where the two countries share borders and the EDF maintained its forces. On April 26, the mayor of Zalambessa, a town along the Eritrean-Ethiopian border, reported to the *Addis Reporter* EDF troops kidnapped more than 100 residents.

On August 14, the VOA reported a humanitarian worker, Yared Melese, was kidnapped for ransom and later killed by an unidentified criminal group operating in Dawunt Woreda of the North Wello Zone in the Amhara Region. Additionally, 14 aid workers reported being kidnapped during the year. The Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Council reported a surge in attacks targeting humanitarian workers in Amhara Region, Oromia Region, and elsewhere across the country.

On August 1, *The Economist* and DW reported the country experienced a kidnapping epidemic, with armed gangs terrorizing travelers on the road from Addis Ababa to Debark in the northern highlands. On July 2, three public buses carrying at least 167 passengers, mostly students from Debark University in the Amhara Region, were traveling to Addis Ababa for the

summer holiday. Unidentified gunmen intercepted the buses near Garba Guracha town in Oromia Region and kidnapped the occupants, taking them to a remote area where the OLA was believed to operate. Two days later, the families of the victims were contacted for ransom, with demands ranging from 500,000 to 700,000 birr (\$6,340 to \$8,880) per captive, according to media reports citing the families. On July 9, despite a government statement claiming 160 of the 167 victims had been released, families disputed this assertion, stating many students were still in the kidnappers' hands.

### **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The constitution and federal law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally did not observe these requirements, especially regarding the mass detentions made under the state of emergency declared in August 2023, which was effective up to June 4.

On May 29, the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) requested the parliament investigate the illegal detention of seven OLF opposition leaders. On September 5, *Addis Standard* reported the release of the seven OLF leaders, after they spent more than four years in detention without charges, despite multiple court orders for their release.

In January, Tadesse Werede, Deputy President of the Tigray Interim Regional Administration, indicated there were 220 Tigrayan former ENDF soldiers in detention, although human rights monitors believed this number to be higher.

Police repeatedly failed to release detainees after a court decided to release them on bail; sometimes, police filed another charge immediately after the court's decision, filed repeated bail appeals, or transferred detainees to regional jurisdictions to face another charge or informal detention centers where their presence would be unknown.

On August 6, *Addis Standard* reported that despite being acquitted of two out of three charges, former Minister of Peace Taye Dendea was denied bail on the remaining charge of possessing illegal weapons. On September 4, the Federal Supreme Court upheld the decision to deny Taye bail but granted bail on December 2. Nonuniformed security services, however, arrested Taye again upon his release from Kilinto detention center. On December 5, media reported he was released December 5. He was expected to face one remaining charge related to possession of illegal firearms.

There were reports of widespread arbitrary or unlawful detention. The government reportedly continued to detain thousands of ethnic Amhara and Oromo after the August 2023 state of emergency and its de jure end on June 4, converting warehouses, schools, youth centers, private residences,

and other makeshift facilities to confine the growing detainee population, according to media reports.

In its July 5 annual report, the EHRC reported numerous instances of arbitrary detentions in the Amhara Region. These detentions, often carried out within the context of the state of emergency but outside the orders of military command, reportedly targeted media personnel, political party members, and civilians accused of supporting armed groups or hiding weapons. Many detainees were held in both regular and irregular detention centers without court orders, and their whereabouts often remained undisclosed for days or weeks, according to the report. These detentions occurred in towns such as Bahir Dar, Debre Tabor, Debre Markos, Finote Selam, Gondar, Kobo, Lalibela, Mekaneselem, and Shewa Robit, with detainees often accused of “supporting the armed group” or “hiding weapons,” according to the EHRC.

The proportion of the inmate population in pretrial detention and average length of time held were not available. Lengthy legal procedures, large numbers of detainees, judicial inefficiency, and staffing shortages contributed to frequent trial delays, in some cases lasting years.

#### **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State’s annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Section 3. Security of the Person**

### **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

Although the constitution prohibited such practices, there were reports security officials tortured and otherwise abused detainees.

According to the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), HRW, Physicians for Human Rights, Amnesty International, and numerous media reports, the government engaged in torture in its security operations and failed to hold government actors accused of torture accountable.

In a May report submitted to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, the OMCT and the EHRCO highlighted several incidents where federal government security forces, including regional police, committed acts of torture. The report stated that government security forces subjected civilians in the Kelafo District of the Somali Region to physical torture, such as flogging and covering their heads with plastic bags filled with pepper powder, resulting in permanent physical injuries and loss

of eyesight.

According to the EHRC, HRW, CARD, and media reports, both the government and militias in Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray regions engaged in torture and mistreatment of civilians and captured combatants. Victims were reportedly beaten with electric cables and metal pipes, detained incommunicado, threatened with guns to their heads, and deprived of food and water. Civilians in western Tigray were reportedly tortured and mistreated mainly because of their ethnic identities. Elsewhere, captured soldiers and fighters, as well as civilian family members of combatants or government officials and those suspected of providing support to combatants or government officials, were reportedly tortured.

According to the EHRC annual report, in Oromia Region a government militia, the Oromia Regional Police, and the ENDF regularly committed arbitrary and mass arrests. These security forces widely beat, tortured, and handcuffed inmates for inhuman periods of time. On August 7, BBC Amharic reported kidnappers whom the victims referred to as “OLA fighters” tortured captives to force the payment of ransom. The abductors received ransom payments between 100,000 birr (\$1,200) and 500,000 birr (\$6,200) to release some while they continued to torture those who were not able to make the payments and threatened to kill them. Media talked to released victims who confirmed the kidnappers killed two men as well as tortured and sexually assaulted the victims.



The EHRC reported severe human rights abuses in Tigray. On July 10, the Tigray Women Association coordinated a demonstration in Mekelle demanding accountability for perpetrators and an end to the “continued suffering of women,” VOA Amharic reported. Association chairperson Abeba Hailesilassie told VOA, “sexual violence has continued in some areas of Tigray under occupation.”

According to research by authors from the Amhara Public Health Institute and Bahir Dar University, published in 2021, the prevalence of FGM/C among girls from birth to age 14 was 18.6 percent, representing a decline from 24 percent reported in the *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey* conducted in 2005. The research also indicated FGM/C was still widely practiced across communities (16 percent among girls younger than age 14, and 65 percent among girls and women ages 15 to 49). The country was home to 25 million circumcised women and girls.

## **b. Protection of Children**

### **Child Labor**

See the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

### **Child Marriage**

The law set the legal minimum age for marriage at 18. Authorities,

however, did not enforce this law uniformly, and rural families sometimes were unaware of or disregarded this provision. Some regions worked on banning early marriages. According to 2016 UNICEF data, 40 percent of women between ages 20 and 24 were married before age 18, and 14 percent were married before age 15. The government strategy to address underage marriage focused on education and mediation rather than punishment of offenders.

### **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in expanding protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern in most regions of the country.

In a June 20 statement and its annual report, the EHRC stated refugees and asylum seekers in the country faced various forms of abuse, including sex-based violence and labor exploitation. In shelters where several unrelated individuals and families were forced to live together in cramped conditions, women and children were particularly vulnerable to these abuses.

Additionally, tensions and conflicts between refugees and host communities, particularly in regions such as Gambella, led to instances of violence by armed groups, further endangering the safety of refugees.

According to a joint statement by the government's Refugees and Returnees

Service and UNHCR , nearly 3,000 refugees were transported to Aftit, with several hundred more moving on their own. Furthermore, lack of adequate registration for Eritrean asylum seekers in Ethiopia led many to be arbitrarily detained throughout the year by local authorities.

On June 10, Al Jazeera reported thousands of Sudanese refugees were living in a forest near Ethiopia's border with Sudan after fleeing attacks by local militias on refugee camps in May. The refugees, who voluntarily left the camps due to repeated raids, theft, rape, and kidnappings, faced harsh conditions. While UNHCR reported approximately 1,000 persons left the camps, refugees claimed at least 7,000 fled, with approximately 3,000 remaining in the forest.

### **Provision of First Asylum**

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government used a refugee status determination system for providing services and protection to refugees.

### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

The Jewish community numbered approximately 10,000 persons. The Addis Ababa Jewish community reported it believed it was protected by the government to practice its faith; however, the community at large faced societal discrimination. Multiple rural Jewish communities reported stigma

against them, citing a belief Jews were possessed by demons, and difficulties in participating in daily life while publicly practicing Judaism.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## **e. Instances of Transnational Repression**

There were reports the government sought to intimidate critics outside its borders. On February 22, HRW reported the Ethiopian government was committing transnational repression, targeting nationals or former nationals abroad to silence or deter dissent.

### **Bilateral Pressure**

On December 8, social media activist Suleiman Abdullah was forcibly extradited back to Ethiopia from Saudi Arabia.