



Weekly Update on the Ongoing War on Amhara (December 17-24, 2023)

Summary

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) has investigated human rights violations and developments related to the war on Amhara for the period between December 17 to 24, 2023. AAA has documented ongoing fighting between Fano freedom fighters and Abiy regime forces throughout Amhara Region, ongoing mass arrests targeting prominent Amhara figures throughout the country (including opposition figures and lawyers), and continued ethnic-based attacks on Amhara civilians by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Oromia Region. AAA has also received reports from internally displaced persons (IDPs) of regime officials pressuring them to forcibly leave their shelters in Amhara Region and relocate to Oromia Region, where they face substantial risks.

Forced Relocation of Amhara Internally Displaced Persons who Survived Genocide

AAA spoke to IDPs taking refuge in four camps across the Amhara Region and verified that Amhara Regional Food Security officials are implementing their forced

relocation to zones in western Oromia Region where they survived genocide. The officials told the IDPs they would be transported south to Debre Birhan town (North Shewa Zone, Amhara Region), then together with IDPs there, would be transported to western Oromia zones including Horo Guduru Wollega, Western Wollega, and East Wollega where mass atrocities were still taking place. The IDPs were told an alternative option would be to leave the camp immediately and forfeit any humanitarian aid and shelter.

An IDP in Mekane Selam IDP camp (South Wollo Zone, Amhara Region) where 2,500 IDPs take refuge told AAA that local food security officials held a discussion session in November 2023 and told them the government set a directive that the IDPs would have to return to Oromia Region. The officials added if the IDPs do not voluntarily comply, the officials would force them to leave the camp. They were later told they would be transported to Debre Birhan and then to western Oromia or else they would have to leave the camp immediately. Another IDP from Jari, located in Tehuledere Woreda (South Wollo Zone) where over 1,400 IDPs reside, shared a similar account with AAA and stated their relocation to western Oromia was a decision that came from the federal government. He further testified they did not receive any aid since October 2023. Other IDPs from Kutaber (Kutaber Woreda, South Wollo Zone) and Jara (Harbru Woreda, North Wollo Zone) camps corroborated this information to AAA's investigators. This report has also been corroborate by various media reports.¹²

AAA is seriously concerned by the expected outcome of this policy especially considering the ongoing hostile situation in western Oromia Region.³ This hostility involves OLA militants responsible for most of the past abuses and local Qeerro youths are armed by the state which still operate with impunity in western Oromia Region. This action amounts to

¹BBC Amharic Report

²DW Amharic Report

³AAA Statement

the involuntary return of IDPs in violation of international law including the Kampala Convention to which Ethiopia is a party and must adhere.

Addis Ababa: Continued arrests of Amhara politicians, lawyers and journalists

AAA has continued to follow Ethiopian Authorities' ongoing mass arrests of Amhara opposition figures, journalists, civic society leaders, activists, and even lawyers who have been representing the arrested victims since April 2023 when widespread civil protest and armed conflict between Fano freedom fighters and the ENDF began. Most of the victims of this wave of arrests include Asst. Professor Sisay Awgichew, President of the Shewa Peace and Development Association, Meskerem Abera, an author and owner of Ethio-Nikat Media, and Dr. Wondwossen Assefa, an opposition figure are all still in jail and being denied their bail rights. The second wave of mass arrests of prominent Amhara figures happened in early August 2023 when Fano fighters were able to capture major towns in the Amhara Region and federal authorities declared a state of emergency. Prominent Amhara figures who enjoyed parliamentary immunity by law including Christian Tadele, a member of the House of People's Representatives, Dr. Kassa Teshager, a member of the Addis Ababa city council, Yohannes Buayalew, a member of the Amhara Regional State Council and The House of Federation and dozens of journalists were victims of this wave of arrest. On November 13, 2023, at 6:30 p.m., Federal police arrested journalist Belay Manaye, co-founder and managing director of Ethio-News online media, as he was leaving his office and took him to Awash Arba military camp.⁴ On November 12 and 14, 2023, rights lawyers, Talema Gizachew and Addisu Getaneh were respectively arrested and eventually taken to Awash Arba military camp.⁵

⁴[CPJ Africa Alert](#)

⁵[AAA Report](#)

As a continuation of these widespread and consistent detention of Amhara figures, the regime forces arrested three notable politicians and a lawyer in the second half of December 2023. On December 17, 2023, federal police officers arrested Dr. Tewodros Hailemariam, former executive official of National Movement of Amhara Party, from his residence in Addis Ababa city. Dr. Hailemariam was an advocate critic of the government and often wrote messages of protest on his private social media account until his detainment. His new book titled “*Amharanism Sacrifice for a Nation*” was also confiscated at the time of his arrest. He is yet to be brought before a court and denied visits from his lawyer.



Figure 1: Opposition figure Tewodros Hailemariam (Ph.D.)

According to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Public Relations Department announced, On December 19, 2023, Ayalew Bitania, a member of the church’s lawyers committee, was arrested by security forces in Mexico Square of Addis Ababa city while he was fuelling his car after leaving a court room.⁶ Ayalew was known for representing victims of the church’s worshippers who were attacked for their religion and identity. He was also one of the key lawyers who represented the church when the government

⁶[Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church PR Department Report](#)

interfered in its affairs by creating an unlawful Oromo nationalist clergy and synod and began intensified attacks and persecution of followers of the church. He is yet to be brought before court and has been denied visits by his co-lawyers.



Figure 2: Lawyer Ayalew Bitania

As the Party announced, on December 20, 2023, Balderas for True Democracy (Balderas) Party executive member and the party's youth affairs chief was arrested by Addis Ababa city security forces at his home.⁷ He is being detained at the 3rd police station of the Addis Ababa city Police Commission. Natnael is one of the Amharas illegally detained on multiple occasions. On December 22, 2023, he was brought before the Arada branch of the Addis Ababa city court. He is baselessly accused of inciting violence and conspiring to undertake the assassination of a senior government official. The court allowed police to detain Natnael on remand.

⁷[Balderas for True Democracy \(Balderas\) Party Update](#)



Figure 3: Opposition figure and advocate Natnael Yalemzewd

Overview of War Developments in Amhara and Continued Genocidal Violence in Oromia Regions

West Gojjam Zone (Amhara Region)

- Since the night of Monday, December 16, 2023 intense fighting took place in various kebeles of Dega Damot Woreda. The attack was launched by Fano militants to push back regime troops, who were said to be encamped in Feres Bet town and neighboring villages. Fano fighters caused substantial casualties and material losses to regime forces. Consequently, regime forces were forced to leave the town and retreated to a mountainous area 10-km away from Feres Bet town. Then, regime forces continued arbitrary shelling of residents with heavy artillery shelling. It was also reported that fighting took place at entry points of the district, particularly at Woyn Wiha and Sekla-Mariam, in an attempt by the regime to deploy reinforcements from Motta and Dembecha, respectively. In such a way, fighting continued for more than five days, and finally, on December 22, 2023, Fano

withdrew from Feres Bet town.

- At least two rounds of drone attacks resulting in civilian casualties were carried out on December 20 and 21, 2023 and heavy civilian casualties due to heavy artillery shells were sustained in Dega Damot Woreda.⁸
- There was also fighting in an area called Yechereka, located on the outskirts of Dembecha town, in the middle of last week. Fano fighters crushed the regime military unit, which was said to be moving towards Dega Damot Woreda. In response to this attack, regime soldiers carried out abuses and severe beatings targeting civilian youths in Dembecha town. It was known that two civilians, a father and son, namely, Demis Sewagegnehu and Sewagegnehu Birhanu, were shot and killed by regime soldiers.
- In addition, Fano militants also attacked and routed regime troops in a brief fight that took place on December 21st in Bure town and surroundings.

East Gojjam Zone (Amhara Region)

- Last Sunday night on December 17, 2023 Fano fighters carried out an offensive against regime troops in a small town called Gubiya in Dejen Woreda of East Gojjam Zone. The attack started late at night, targeting an area where regime troops were encamped. It was reported that Fano fighters caused substantial damage to regime forces. It was said that almost all members of the ENDF unit who were present inside the camp were killed, injured, and captured by Fano fighters. Later, it was known that the regime deployed additional forces and retook the area on the Monday.
- In Amanuel town of Machakel Woreda, fierce fighting took place since December 20, 2023. According to sources, after heavy exchange of fire, Fano fighters defeated

⁸[DW Amharic article](#)

regime troops and pushed them out of the town on December 21, 2023.

Accordingly, Fano militants were able to control the majority of areas of Amanuel town. But fighting continued as the regime sent reinforcement forces from Debre Markos.

- In Debre Markos city, there was a short-lived exchange of fire, particularly in the entry areas of Sinan Woreda, on December 20. Following the attack in Debre Markos, ENDF left Rebu Gebeya town of Sinan Woreda on Wednesday night.
- On Thursday night and Friday morning, December 22, Fano fighters carried out an offensive and pushed regime troops out of Yejube town of Baso Liben Woreda. Yet, the regime moved and stationed their forces at Technic College, located a short distance away from Yejube. While retreating from Yejube, they were arbitrarily shelling artillery and carrying out abuses against civilians. It was also reported that they deliberately destroyed farmers' crops.
- On December 23, 2023, regime forces carried out a drone attack in Kork town (Baso Liben Woreda) targeting the Kebe private clinic killing at least five civilians.

Bahir Dar City Administration (Amhara Region)

- In Bahir Dar city, despite no prolonged fighting, Fano fighters took sporadic attacks inside the city and surrounding area. For example, last Sunday, Fano carried out a surprise attack on regime soldiers moving from Bahir Dar to Adet and caused substantial damage.
- On Friday, December 22, Fano also took a surprise attack on regime forces inside the city at Kebele 14 and reportedly killed and wounded an unknown number of local militias and Amhara police members.

North Wollo Zone (Amhara Region)

- North Wollo Zone witnessed intense fighting between regime forces and Fano in three areas.
- The first is still active and has taken place in the area surrounding Mersa town in Habru Woreda. In the fighting, regime forces have indiscriminately attacked unarmed civilians. They indiscriminately shelled villages in Bhoru Kebele as eyewitnesses from Mersa town can see the smoke of burned houses by artillery shells. We have also received reports of extrajudicial killing of civilians including children by regime forces in the kebele. On December 23, 2023, there was fighting in a place close to Gatira St. George's Church in Wurgessa town. In retaliation for losses to Fano, regime forces abducted around 30 youths accusing them of affiliation with Fano fighters. After transporting them to their camp, regime troops severely beat the youths.
- The second outbreak of fighting occurred in Dawint Woreda and neighboring Delenga Kebele of Wadla Woreda. It was initiated by regime forces to take control of Dawint Woreda which was under Fano fighters' control for three weeks. On December 19, regime forces entered Dawint Woreda and began mass arrests of youths accusing them of associating with Fano fighters.
- The third incident occurred in Kobo town (Raya Kobo Woreda). Fano fighters entered Kobo town on the night of December 22, 2023, and commenced a surprise offensive operation. As a result, two regional anti-riot police and one state militia member were killed.

South Wollo Zone (Amhara Region)

- Last week, regime forces entered Wegel Tena town, administrative center of Delanta Woreda, which was under Fano control for 2 months, while Fano fighters continue

operating in surrounding areas including Tsehay Mewcha town and carried out offensive operations against regime forces. On the night of December 17, 2023, Fano fighters opened an attack on encamped regime forces in the town. As a result, they killed 16 regime forces while only losing 2 fighters. But regime forces have been mass arresting civilian youths in the town. So far, they detained over 51 youths accusing them of associating with Fano fighters. The regime forces are also forcing detainees to speak to medias claiming to be surrendered Fano fighters. The regime forces have also carried out widespread assaults on residents. An opal trader named Tadesse Fikadu was physically assaulted by regime forces, sustaining wounds on his head, and his opal mine was looted by regime forces. Another young man named Ayehu Kebede was similarly assaulted, seriously injured and his private gun was confiscated by regime forces who they accused of being a Fano fighter. Both victims are receiving medical treatment in Wegel Tena General Hospital.

Central Gonder Zone (Amhara Region)

- Most of the Central Gonder Zonal Administration saw conflict between Fano and regime forces this week. Most of the fighting in Central Gonder Zone was conducted in Wogera, Denbiya and Chilga Woredas.
- Intense fighting was conducted in Ayeba, Kebele of Wogera Woreda on December 18 and 19, 2023. The regime forces burned farmers' houses in Ayeba Kebele of Wogera Woreda on December 18, 2023. Farmers whose houses were burned by regime forces include Baye Abebe, Basha Abebe, Rede Birara and Girma Birara
- There was also fighting in Ayenba Kebele of Chilga Woreda on December 18, 2023.
- Various Majors (Shaleqas) of Fanos in Central Gonder Zone are approaching to form a single command after extensive consultations. Most of the Majors who are forming Single Command reside in East and West Denbiya, Alefa, Takussa, Chilga

and Gonder Zuriya Woredas.

South Gonder Zone (Amhara Region)

- Most of South Gonder Zone was relatively stable last week compared to the previous weeks. Civilian casualties were reported in Hamusit and Anbesame towns of Dera Woreda. Light exchange of fires between Fano and regime forces was reported in Tach Gayint Woreda on December 18 and 19, 2023.

North Gonder Zone (Amhara Region)

- North Gonder Zone has been relatively stable in terms of fighting between Fano and regime forces since the beginning of the war in Amhara Region. However devastating drought has been recorded in Beyeda, Janamora, and Telemt Woredas of North Gonder Zone. Due to the drought people living in these areas have been subject to displacement to bordering woredas.

North Shewa Zone (Amhara Region)

- On December 22, 2023, there was intense fighting between regime forces and Fano fighters in Rasa Kebele of Kewot Woreda and in surrounding areas of Shewa Robit town, the second largest town in the zone. Fano fighters were able to push regime forces out of the town and entered it on the same date. After regime forces began indiscriminately shelling the town causing civilian deaths and injuries from a nearby hill, Fano fighters left the populous town and continued operations in surrounding kebeles.
- On the same date (December 22), Fano fighters pushed regime forces out of Arerti town, administrative center of Minjar Shenkora Woreda, and entered it after intense fighting. After regime forces received reinforcements, Fano fighters withdrew to

surrounding rural areas the next day. At the time of this report, regime forces are carrying out drone surveillance.

Dera Woreda of North Shewa Zone (Oromia Region)

- On December 19, 2023, OLA militants raided Were Meneyo Kebele of Dera Woreda (North Shewa Zone, Oromia Region) and killed two Amhara residents, injured a third resident, and abducted five additional residents who have been held hostage. As AAA has verified from sources, the OLA militants carried out the attack on the morning of December 19th on the victims, who were members of a single family. One of the deceased victims is an elderly woman and the mother of five children. All five hostages are female, and two are infants. AAA was able to identify the names of the deceased and wounded victims as follows. The deceased victims were: (1) Anteneh Bareke and (2) Emebuye Bogale, an elderly woman. And the name of the wounded victim is Bogale Balke.⁹

Sherka Woreda of Arsi Zone (Oromia Region)

- On December 17, 2023, OLA militants carried out an attack targeting followers of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church and ethnic Amharas in the Sherka Woreda of Arsi Zone. OLA militants launched this attack while the victims were traveling by vehicle in the same district. According to media sources, many civilians were killed and an unknown number were kidnapped in this attack. Nahusenay Adam, Abebe Tsegaye, Awgichew Moges, and Semere Adefris are among the victims said to have been killed in this attack.

⁹AAA Update

About Amhara Association of America (AAA)

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) is a non-profit civic organization located in Charlotte, North Carolina that investigates and documents human rights atrocities and repression against Amharas in Ethiopia. AAA seeks to inform U.S. policymakers, international human rights organizations, media, and all Ethiopian stakeholders to pressure Ethiopian leaders to change laws, policies, and practices in Ethiopia so perpetrators are held accountable and victims receive justice. AAA also collaborates with Amhara organizations in the U.S., supports independent Amhara organizations in Ethiopia, and provides humanitarian aid for Amharas impacted due to targeted ethnic attacks. AAA's funding comes directly from members and supporters; the organization is not affiliated with any Ethiopian or American political or governmental entities.

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