



Arbitrary detention and bodily injury of students, parents, and teachers following forceful hoisting of the Oromia Regional flag in schools in Addis Ababa city

Executive Summary

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) has conducted an investigation on human rights violations perpetrated by government security officials on civilians following the forceful hoisting of the Oromia Region flag and singing of its anthem in different schools within the Addis Ababa city administration of Ethiopia. The AAA collected primary data from students, witnesses, and teachers in connection with incidents that transpired between December 1st and 15th, 2022 in various schools in Addis Ababa (capital city of Ethiopia). Based on the findings of the investigation, AAA has verified that:

- **209 teachers, students, and individuals were subject to arbitrary detentions** under allegations of organizing opposition;
- **64 students, teachers, and other individuals were confirmed to have sustained injuries by security personnel** however estimates indicate hundreds of students were injured in various primary and secondary schools;

-
- **81 students from different schools received warnings from schools** without viable justifications;
 - **dozens of teachers were forced to resign from their work and considerable properties of schools were subject to damage** following the unrest and
 - **22 primary and secondary schools located in different sub-cities of Addis Ababa were impacted by the policy** imposed by the Addis Ababa city administration, however the policy is expected to expand across schools in the area.

The findings of this investigative report reveal a pattern of targeted human rights abuses and identity-based discrimination perpetrated by the government administration in partnership with local enforcers.

Historical and Political Context

Addis Ababa is the largest city and federal capital of Ethiopia. The city traces its roots back to the medieval capital of *Barara* which flourished as the nation's capital during the 15th century under the Emperor Dawit and the city is said to have housed members of the Solomonic dynasty of Ethiopia over centuries. In the 16th century, Barara became besieged and was largely destroyed during successive invasions by the *Adal* Sultanate and *Oromo* expansions. In the late 18th century, the Emperor Menelik II restored the capital city which was renamed *Addis Ababa* (meaning "new flower" in Amharic) by the Empress Taytu. Following that, subsequent governments preserved Addis Ababa as the capital city of Ethiopia until the present day. After the Derg administration was ousted from central power in late 1991, the *Tigray People's Liberation Front* (TPLF)-led *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF) came to power. The TPLF-led EPRDF government quickly imposed a new ethnic-based federal structure in Ethiopia. In the ethnic-based federalism structure, the TPLF deliberately encircled Addis Ababa, which was designated a chartered city, with the newly created Oromia

Regional State.¹ Since the imposition of the ethnic federalism system, Oromo ultra-nationalists were enabled to strengthen historical claims to Addis Ababa and proposed a vision of an ethnically homogenous city. This occurred despite ethnic Amharas and other non-Oromo groups comprising the majority of Addis Ababa's population and the Amharic language being most widely spoken.

In 2018 popular protests from the Amhara, Oromo and other communities led to the end to TPLF's domination of the central government. Shortly after, this led to the creation of the new Prosperity Party coalition government dominated by its Oromo branch, the *Oromo Prosperity Party* (OPP).² The OPP which operated on a political base promoting Oromo nationalism and expansionism began imposing policies in Addis Ababa which observers criticized as promoting Oromo hegemony and apartheid. Part of this policy shift included the forceful incorporation of Addis Ababa into the Oromia Regional State. As clear evidence of this, in July 2022, the Addis Ababa city administration led by Oromo nationalist ideologues reached an agreement with the Oromia Regional Government regarding redrawing of inter-regional boundaries and new boundary demarcations between the two administrative areas. Without consulting residents of Addis Ababa, the revised border demarcation sought to incorporate the *Legetafo*, *Burayu*, *Sebeta*, *Gelan*, and *Sululta* areas of Addis Ababa city into the Oromia Region. However, even this arrangement was not enough to satisfy the expansionist mentality of the Oromo politicians holding positions of power at various levels of government including the federal level, and

¹Addis Ababa's designation as a chartered city was due to its ethnic diversity and status as the federal capital. However under successive regimes, it was customary for members of the ruling party and their affiliates to enjoy elevated status and access to special resources above the law. This was accompanied by a policy of enforcing identification and official documentation on the basis of ethnic identity which at times was imposed arbitrarily. This facilitated a system of social stratification based on identity and determined citizens' access to jobs, opportunities, resources, economic benefits, subsidies, taxing, property/asset ownership and other goods and amenities.

²The OPP is also known as the Oromo People's Democratic Organization or OPDO) which was a member of the EPRDF coalition. When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali came to power in 2018 he implemented a series of reforms and eventually formed a new coalition government called the Prosperity Party which resembled the EPRDF but did not include the TPLF which refused to join.

at the level of the Addis Ababa city administration. This motivation has paved the way for the *Oromization* of Addis Ababa city in every sector.³ In accordance with this program, starting in 2021 the OPP-led administration began imposing these expansionist policies in Addis Ababa in the form of hoisting the Oromia Region flag throughout schools in Addis Ababa city. These efforts were particularly accelerated starting from December 8, 2022, when the Addis Ababa city Administration in collaboration with the OPP began forcing students in various primary and secondary schools in Addis Ababa to sing the Oromia Region anthem in the Oromiffa (Afan Oromo) language. Further, they also forced the flag to be hoisted in Addis Ababa schools. Following this, at least 19 schools in Addis Ababa have stopped delivering the normal teaching-learning process indefinitely. Across these schools, dozens of students, teachers, and parents who denounced imposing Oromo identity have been arrested by the city administration and federal security personnel. This report outlines some of the human rights violations that were perpetrated in primary and secondary schools in Addis Ababa in connection with the ruling OPP imposing its expansionist agenda to forcibly incorporate Addis into the Oromia Regional State.

Overview of incidents

Starting in 2021, there were forceful attempts to hoist the flag of the Oromia Regional State in Addis Ababa Primary and Secondary Schools. There are also attempts to forcefully order students in Addis Ababa to sing the anthem of the Oromia Regional State.

³*Oromization* or the notion of *Orumuma* refers to a concerted and deliberate process undertaken by the ruling Oromo Prosperity Party and its affiliates (Oromo opposition political parties, media agencies, influencers, community leaders, etc) to transform various geographical locations (including Addis Ababa) to exclusively reflect the identity of a single ethnic group - the Oromo, irrespective of demographic makeup. This concept involves forcibly imposing the Oromiffa language, Oromo culture and beliefs, and promotes the disproportionate economic empowerment of the Oromo people at the expense of other groups based on a historic entitlement to many areas. The ruling OPP regime has been accused of implementing this policy at the municipal, regional and federal levels and of enforcing a new form of apartheid or social stratification system in which ethnic Oromo people and Oromiffa speakers and selectively conferred access to resources, benefits and incentives. Also integral to this concept is land expansion of the Oromia Regional State which exists as sovereign entity independent of the Ethiopian state. This concept incentivizes demographic engineering, ethnic cleansing and state-sponsored violence to acquire territories especially on the periphery of the current borders of the Oromia Region.

Following that, students, teachers, and parents strongly oppose the city administration program, and ultra-nationalist Oromo politicians and the issue became calm for some time. However, starting from early December 2022, radical politicians from within the government started a second campaign to forcibly raise the Oromia Regional flag and force students to sing the Oromia Regional anthem in the Oromiffa language. After they tried to forcefully raise the Oromia Region flag within Addis Ababa city administration, the acts were blatantly opposed by students, teachers, and parents. One of AAA's sources by the name of Molla Kibret (name changed), a primary school student in Addis Ababa recounted how the Oromia Region anthem was imposed on students and how they would face attacks for refusing to sing it despite not knowing the language:

“We don't know the language and we don't know the anthem of the (Oromia) region, but they forced us to sing the anthem with the Oromiffa language. When we refused their order, they beat and insulted us with the help of security forces.”

He added further context describing an emerging trend of identity-based discrimination and physical abuses against Amharic-speaking students by ethnic Oromo school staff which demonstrated clear Amharaphobic prejudice:

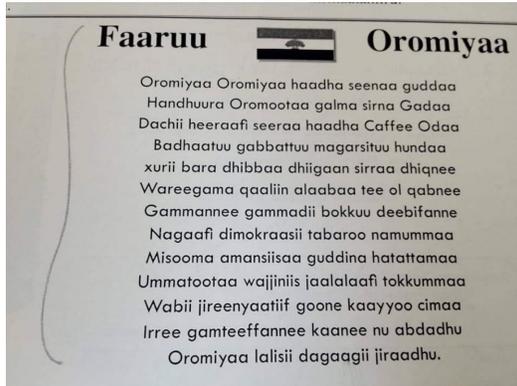
“Most guards of schools in Addis Ababa are now from the Oromo ethnic group; even if they know the Amharic language they don't want to speak it to students who only speak the Amharic language. When we refused to sing the anthem together with the ethnic Oromo students, the school guards have beaten Amharic (language) speaking students on many occasions. Federal and Addis Ababa city administration police were also deployed to help them in their unacceptable mission of Oromizing Addis Ababa.”

Following these incidents until the preparation of this report, arbitrary detention of students, teachers and, community activists continued with the mere reason that they

opposed the Oromia Region flag being hoisted in Addis Ababa schools. The arbitrary detention was dominantly targeting students, teachers and parents, who are to the Amhara ethnic identity that oppose the ongoing acts of the Oromo expansionist mentality. The incidents were especially focused on schools located in the Gulele, Kirkos, Yeka, Addis Ketema, and Kolfe-Keranio sub-cities (kifle-ketemas) of Addis Ababa. Below is a list of primary and secondary schools in which Oromo expansionists were creating havoc by forcing students to hoist the Oromia Regional State flag and sing the anthem.

No.	School Name	Sub-city
1	Comprehensive Secondary School	Kolfe-Keranio
2	Selam-Ber Primary School	Kolfe-Keranio
3	Millennium Primary School	Kolfe-Keranio
4	Yekatit 23 Secondary School	Addis Ketema
5	Shimeles Habtie Secondary School	Kirkos
6	Abiyot Kirs Secondary School	Kirkos
7	Temenja Yaj Primary and Elementary School	Kirkos
8	Entoto Amba Secondary School	Gulele
9	Mulu Birhan Preliminary School	Gulele
10	Dil-Betigil Primary School	Gulele
11	Addis-Tesfa Primary School	Gulele
12	Yeka Secondary and Preparatory School	Yeka
13	Wondirad Primary and Secondary School	Yeka
14	Addis Ketema Secondary School	Addis Ketema
15	Ayer-Tena Secondary School	Kolfe-Keranio
16	Woizero Kelemework Secondary School	Arada
17	Frehiwot Secondary School	Nifas-Silk Lafto
18	Gelan Secondary School	Akaki-Kaliti
19	Kilinto Primary School	Akaki-Kaliti

20	Biherawi Primary School	Kirkos
21	Felege Yordanos Primary School	Kirkos
22	Kechene Debre-Selam School	Gulele



(a) Original lyrics in Oromiffa (Afan Oromo)

የአማርኛ ትርጉም (Amharic Translation):

አሮሚያ ፣ አሮሚያ ፣ የትልቅ ታሪክ እናት
 የአሮሞ እትብት፣ የገዳ ስርአት መገኛ
 የህግና ደምብ ስፍራ ፣ የአዳ ምክር ቤት
 የበለጸገች፣ የለመለመች ፣ ሁሉን ምታብቅል ።።
 የመቶ አመትን እድፍ በደም አጥብንሽ
 በውድ መስዋእትነት ባንዲራሽን ከፍ አርገን
 ደስ ብሎናል፣ ደስ ይበልሽ ፣ ራሳችንን ገዝተናል
 ሰላምና ዲሞክራሲ፣ የሰብአዊነት ክብር
 አሳማኝ ልማት፣ ፈጣን እድገት
 ፍቅርና እንድነት ከሌሎች ህዝቦች ጋር
 ለህይወት ዋስትና ትልቅ ግብ አርገናል
 ከንድ እንስተናል፣ ተስፋ አድርጊብን
 አሮሚያ አበልጽጊ፣ እድገ ፣ ኑሪ።

(b) Amharic translation

English Translation:

Oromia, Oromia, mother of great history
 Hilum of Oromos, hub of the Gadaa system
 Earth of law and norm, mother of Oda congress
 Prosperous, fertile, and can grow all
 We washed dirt of 100 years with blood
 We raised your flag with priceless sacrifice
 We are happy, so should you be; our self-governance is back
 For peace, and democracy, respect for humanity
 For credible development and quick growth
 For love and unity with other nations
 For life guarantee, we have set a firm goal
 We have brought our forearms
 Oromia; prosper, develop, and prevail!

(c) English translation

Figure 1: The lyrics of the anthem (in Oromiffa) which was forcibly imposed on students in primary and secondary schools in Addis Ababa is displayed. The translation in Amharic and English are available. The anthem promotes Oromo nationalism and contains connotations that are offensive and direct hatred towards ethnic Amharas and Ethiopia at large.



Figure 2: Photograph of the Oromia Regional Flag (contains three horizontal bands which from top-bottom are red, white and black, with a tree in the center) being hoisted outside the *Entoto Amba Secondary School* (also called *Amha Desta School*) on December 1st, 2022.

Details of the incidents

The pattern of abuses followed a similar trend across schools in the reporting period between December 1st and 15th, 2022. The Oromia Regional flag was forcibly raised (often in place of the national flag) and anthem was imposed despite the majority of students being unable to comprehend and speak in the Oromiffa language. The flag and anthem were imposed by school officials and staff often with support from other collaborators with support from administrative officials. The policy prompted students, teachers and parents to protest which in turn led to deployment of security officials which used excessive force and arbitrary arrests to quell the protests.

As an illustration of the incidents, one source from **Selam-Ber Primary School** in Kolfe-Keranio sub-city (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) said, on December 3rd, 2022 morning, ethnic Oromo students in collaboration with school guards hoisted the Oromia Regional

flag while singing the Oromia Region anthem. Following this act, students and teachers opposed the act insisting:

“Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia, the city belongs to every Ethiopian, and the working (federal) language of Ethiopia is the Amharic language. Accordingly, it is unacceptable to hoist the Oromia Regional State flag and sing its anthem.”

Following the opposition of students and teachers, school guards and members of Addis Ababa police were deployed to the school to ensure the flag was raised and anthem was sung. They started beating students who opposed the Oromia Region flag being hoisted in the school. AAA’s sources confirmed, *“It was disturbing. There were clear discriminatory measures taken by security forces. They were saying Addis Ababa is the land of Oromia, we are within our full right to do whatever we want here.”* After the security forces entered the school, they detained a student by the name of Fekadu Eba who they accused of leading the student opposition and proceeded to beat him which caused him to sustain severe injuries. Another 10 students not identified by name were also subjected to bodily injuries by the use of excessive force by security forces. On the next day, December 4th, 2022, the normal teaching-learning process had been indefinitely suspended. On that day, authorities from the Addis Ababa city administration came to Selam-Ber school and were threatening teachers whom they alleged were obstructing the raising of the Oromia Region flag. Following this threat from the city administration, teachers named Siraji (last name unknown) and Ermias (last name unknown) were forced to resign from their work, effective immediately. Another five students including Fekadu Eba were given final warnings from the school despite not having committed any wrongdoing.

A similar incident occurred on December 1st, 2022 in **Yeka Abado Secondary and Preparatory School** located in the Yeka sub-city of Addis Ababa. Following this, students gathered by opposing the city administration’s act of hoisting the Oromia Region

flag in their school. Shortly after, the demonstration changed to conflict when Addis Ababa police were deployed in the school and started to forcefully silence the voices of students. As a result of this at least 14 students were severely injured and one additional teacher also suffered serious bodily injury. All of them were taken to hospitals and upon the compilation of this report, most of them were receiving medical care in hospitals. In this school alone, more than 12 students were arbitrarily arrested.

Between December 1st and 3rd, 2022, the controversy spread to the **Entoto Amba Secondary School** (also called the Amha Desta School), located in the Gulele sub-city of Addis Ababa. Following the incident, at least 17 teachers, 1 school guard, and 11 students were arbitrarily arrested by security forces alleging that they organized students to oppose the hoisting of the Oromia Region flag in the school. Dozens of students were also injured by security forces and by stones thrown by ethnic Oromo students. Teachers named Netsanet Wudu and Henok Abebe were also arrested from **Kechene Secondary School**, located in the Gulele sub-city of Addis Ababa, under similar circumstances. Below are names of teachers who have been detained by security personnel in Entoto Amba Secondary School:

No	Victim name	Sex	Result	Profession
1	Seife Tarekegn	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
2	Million Abebe	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
3	Tayachew Akalu	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
4	Emaye Gebere	F	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
5	Zemene Getie	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
6	Misganaw Chane	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
7	Fikru Girum	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
8	Zewdu Aregahegn	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
9	Matias Melese	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher

10	Mehad Tesfaye	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
11	Yekoye Ashagrie	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
12	Wondimagegn Ayele	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
13	Zebiba Ayalew	F	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
14	Sofia Shemsu	F	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
15	Zelalem Leul	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
16	Melsew Terefe	M	Arbitrarily arrested	Teacher
17	Shanbel Yohannes	M	Arbitrarily arrested	School guard



Figure 3: Photographed is Zemene Getie, one of the teachers that was arbitrarily arrested in Entoto Amba Secondary School.

Between December 7 and 10, 2022, skirmishes broke out in **Temeja Yaj Secondary School** located in Kirkos sub-city of Addis Ababa, following attempts to forcefully hoist the Oromia Region flag and to sing the anthem. In this incident at least 20 students sustained bodily injuries by security forces. In addition to the bodily injury of students

who opposed the imposition of the Oromia Region flag being hoisted in Addis Ababa, the incident resulted in the collapse of doors and windows of the Temeja Yaj Secondary School. Sources in the area told AAA at least 15 students, teachers, and residents were also subjected to arbitrary arrests by security personnel following the incident. At least six students also received warnings from the school alleging that they were leading the protests.

In the **Comprehensive Secondary School** located in Addis Ketema sub-city of Addis Ababa, the forceful hoisting of the regional flag and singing of its anthem was started on December 7, 2022. Following this attempt, there was tension in the school between December 8 and 10, 2022. On December 8, 2022, students who opposed the action of the government gathered and denounced the act of the city administration saying “*this is Addis Ababa; you have no legal ground to hoist the Oromia Regional State flag here and sing the anthem*”. They also added if the Oromia Regional State flag is hoisted here, the other 10 regional state flags must also be hoisted. Following that, security personnel from the Addis Ababa city administration were deployed to the school and silenced the voice of students by beating them which resulted in grave and common bodily injury. At least 11 students were injured by security personnel. Five students were also arbitrarily detained by the security forces including a student by the name of Bereket Molla.

On December 15, 2022, in **Woizero Kelemework Secondary School** which is located in Arada sub-city of Addis Ababa city, a similar incident occurred. When students and teachers opposed the hoisting of the Oromia Region flag and singing of the anthem, security forces attempted to silence them by force and in the process injured several students. According to AAA sources, at least 7 students were injured though they expected the number might be far greater than this. An unidentified number of students and teachers were also arrested, among the arrested individuals was the teachers’

representative of Woizero Kelemework Secondary School who was arrested without reason. At least five students from **Bulbula Secondary School** of the Akaki-Kliti, one by the name of Abel Binalf were also detained by security personnel.

In other schools such as **Millennium Primary School, Yekatit 23 Primary and Secondary School, Shimeles Habtie Secondary School, Abiyot Kirs Secondary School, Dil-Betigil Primary School, Addis Tesfa Primary School, Wondirad Primary and Secondary School**, and **Addis Ketema Secondary School**, at least 141 students and teachers have been arrested following their suspected opposition to hoisting the Oromia Region flag in schools located under the Addis Ababa city administration. At least 70 students have been given warnings from their respective schools alleging that they were organizing protests against the hoisting of the Oromia Region flag. Dozens were also injured by security personnel and school properties were also damaged.

Following the occurrence of these incidents in various primary and secondary schools in Addis Ababa, city administration officials have been holding a series of meetings in different schools including in schools where such movements had not happened. In the meetings, teachers and parents of students were the major participants. However, according to AAA source Nathan Gebru (name changed) who participated in the meeting held at **Abeboch Fire Primary School**, confirmed that meetings were held to persuade parents to accept the hoisting of the regional flag in Addis Ababa schools. Though parents condemned the acts saying this is a clear sign of Oromizing Addis Ababa without having legal, moral, and reasonable justification to do so. Similar meetings were also held in various others schools with a similar motivation to persuade parents to accept the hoisting of the Oromia Region flag. AAA source Haile Getachew (name changed) who participated in the meeting held at **Africa Union Secondary School** told AAA in addition to persuading parents about the hoisting of the Oromia Region flag and the action of

singing the regional anthem in Addis Ababa schools, officials of the Addis Ababa city administration were trying to externalize their unacceptable act. He explained:

“They pretended Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia, home of more than 80 nations and nationalities. However, as the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and international human rights document ratified by Ethiopia allow everyone to get an education in their mother tongue we allowed Oromo students to attend their education in the Oromiffa language. Following that, hoisting their flag and singing the anthem of the Oromia Regional State in Addis Ababa is acceptable and legitimate. We know you are not opposing the flag of the Oromia Regional State to be hoisted in Addis Ababa; rather it was the mission of the Amhara Fano extremists by organizing groups that created such types of havoc in Addis Ababa schools.”

Even if officials of the city administration fabricated such ungrounded narratives, parents and teachers categorically rejected them. They denounced that this was an unacceptable move by the OPP to forcibly incorporate Addis Ababa under the Oromia Regional State. By pretending the havoc was created by Amhara dissents and political organizations that support Amhara causes and questioned the Addis Ababa city administration, they started a major crackdown against anyone whom they believe could be an impediment to their expansionist movement. Among the arbitrarily arrested individuals is Natnael Yalem-Zewd who was arrested on December 12, 2022 and Kassahun Desta, both of whom are members of opposition political party Balderas for True Democracy (Balderas) Party.

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.

- Contact us via Email: info@amharaamerica.org
- Visit our website at www.AmharaAmerica.org
- Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)
- Subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#) and contact us on Telegram via:
+1-404-458-7046
- To make donations: <https://www.amharaamerica.org/get-involved>

