



Update on Developments in Ethiopia – May 29, 2023

Executive Summary

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) has verified that as of May 29th, 2023, ongoing ethnic and religious based conflict has led to widespread human rights violations throughout Addis Ababa city.

- Attacks from federal and Oromia Region forces and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) have left scores of civilians killed in the North Shewa and East Wollega Zones of Oromia Region,
- The Oromo-dominated Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) has continued its attacks on multiple areas of Amhara Region and has been met with fierce resistance from Fano which have led to casualties among the Oromo ENDF. The ENDF has continued heavy artillery shelling of monasteries and churches in Debre Elias Woreda (East Gojjam Zone, Amhara Region).
- New reports reveal widespread use of torture and related human rights violations. At least 28 detained Amhara victims which were previously missing have been identified. In addition, names of suspected perpetrators (key security officials) have also been identified.

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- Recent demolitions of Mosques in and around Addis Ababa by Oromia Region authorities prompted demonstrations during which security forces fired on unarmed protesters leading to civilian casualties.
 - Renewed pressure from Federal and Oromia Region authorities and the state-sponsored *Oromia Nations and Nationalities Synod* group against leaders of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) have been followed by new attacks, arrests and threats against followers of the EOTC and influencers.

Compiled updates on various ongoing developments are available below.

Update on War and Developments in Amhara Region

- According to AAA's sources, on May 29th, 2023, special commando forces were deployed to Yibar Kebele of Meragna Woreda (North Shewa Zone) by helicopter. Federal forces in this area are attempting encircle local Fano and militias which is expected to exacerbate fighting. In addition, the main road connecting Merhabete (North Shewa Zone) to Jama woreda (South Wollo Zone) has been closed due to tensions in this area. The Federal Government has continued deploying ENDF reinforcement units were previously deployed to Jama and Were-Ilu Woredas (South Wollo Zone) and Mergana Woreda on May 27th, 2023 as well.
- According to Ethio-News, since May 26th, 2023, heavy gunfire was heard in Debre Elias Woreda (East Gojjam Zone).¹ The gunfire was heard inside St. Melka Aste Holy Trinity Monastery. Worshippers and monks are reportedly killed and injured by ENDF forces. On May 29th, 2023, heavy artillery was fired on the monasteries including the St. Melka Aste Holy Trinity Monastery.²

¹See May 27th, 2023 media [report](#) from Ethio-News.

²See May 29th, 2023 media reports from [Ethio-News](#) and [Tewahedo Media Center](#) (TMC). TMC is closely affiliated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

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- According to Ethio-News, residents of Amhara Region have continued to voice fierce opposition to the Prosperity Party regime’s war on Amhara people.³ Federal forces have continued mass arrests and harassment of youth, road closures and pressuring locals to stop their resistance through coercion and terror. Meanwhile, news of continued mobilization of armed forces equipped with heavy weapons have continued to emerge in Welkait, Raya and throughout Tigray Region.
 - On May 28th, 2023, five youth were abducted in the area surrounding Shewa Robit (North Shewa Zone).⁴
 - Roads in the Were-Ilu, Jama and Meragna areas (South Wollo and North Shewa Zones) have been closed for five days. The ENDF soldiers are harassing youth in Degolo town (Jama Woreda).
 - On May 25, 2023, General Abebaw Tadesse and General Getachew Gudina convened a meeting with local elders and residents in Kewet Woreda (North Shewa Zone) at the woreda clergy hall. The agenda was to disarm Fano. The elders were divided into two the agenda. Half of them opposed disarming Fano who is protecting the people from OLA’s attacks, while others supported the government’s plan. Finally, General Abebaw threatened to take measures against Fano if the elders could not convince the Fano to return to town and disarm. Over 20 firearms were confiscated in Shewa Robit town alone.
 - Several participants of conferences of leaders at each zonal level opposed the law enforcement opposition against Fano saying “*Fano are our precious children.*” There are also participants that decisions should be made from the bottom-up approach that just implements what is imposed from the center and we should hear to opposition voices. But chairs of the conferences did not adopt the questions.

³See May 26th, 2023 media report from Ethio-News

⁴See May 29th, 2023 media report from Ethio-News.

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- Government media reported that TPLF militias handed over heavy weapons in a location near to Mekele town. However, Ethio-News’ sources indicate that many army contingents remain heavily armed near Welkait and Raya and surrounding areas. Kibreab, administrator of Welkait Woreda says the government media’s claim is a joke and that TPLF militias are still heavily armed with mechanized tanks, ZU-23s and are encamped in the woredas neighboring Shire (Tigray Region) areas. Several armies are moving in different areas, Army 15, in Hawzen, Army 13 in areas parallel to Welkait, Army 14 and 24 in Maychew, and Army 44 in Chercher. Recently, TPLF chairperson, Debretsion Gebremichael is physically appearing before the armies and forwarded motivational speeches.
 - According to Voice of Amhara, Amhara residents in Shebel Bereta Woreda (East Gojjam Zone) refused to cooperate with ENDF in its so-called law enforcement operation against Amhara Fano, though the residents were threatened they would not get fertilizer if they do not cooperate.⁵ So the ENDF soldiers opened heavy gunfire on Fano at night to avoid clashes with the residents of the woreda. However, the soldiers have lost the battles and faced crushing defeats from the Fano. The ENDF is being helped by some paid local police members and state militias.
 - According to Ashara Media, on May 29th, 2023, Amhara farmers gathered in Bahir Dar city and nearby towns to protest the lack of distribution of seeds and fertilizer.⁶ The farmers voiced their displeasure with the policy which is believed to be an attack on Amhara farmers by the Prosperity Party regime. Similar protests were reportedly held in various parts of West Gojjam and East Gojjam Zones including in Yilmana Densa, Jabitenan, North Mecha, and Sekela Woreda.
 - The *Amhara Region Reconstruction and Development Office* head Abate Getahun,

⁵See May 26th, 2023 media [report](#) from Voice of Amhara.

⁶See May 29th, 2023 media [report](#) from Ashara Media.

citing a report made by his office, says an estimated 500 million ETB in property destruction has occurred in the region. Half of the destruction caused across the country during the Northern Ethiopian armed conflict is in the Amhara Region. The destruction covers seven zones and three metropolitan cities in the region. The report also says 1.2 million IDPs displaced from different parts of the country are in dire situations in the region. 11.2 million people are in immediate need of aid due to the conflict and related causes.

Update on Amhara Genocide in Oromia Region

- AAA has confirmed that on May 29th, 2023, two separate attacks were committed against Amharas in Dera Woreda (North Shewa Zone).⁷ The first incident was occurred in an area called Tuti Homa, which resulted for the killing of 2 people. Sources reported that the perpetrators of the attack are the members of the FDRE Defense Forces.
 - As for the identity of the deceased, both are ethnic Amharas and their names are:
 1. Abebe Bogale (Male)
 2. Yeshanew Bezabih (Male)
 - According to sources, both victims were farmers and had no political involvement. Residents also reported the deceased victims were fathers of children and were older than 45 years of age.

⁷There is a zone called *North Shewa* both in the Amhara and Oromia Regions, however under both cases, the inhabitants are predominantly ethnic Amharas. The Dera Woreda in particular has a majority Amhara population but has been subject to repeated attacks by the Oromo Liberation Army, Oromia Region Special Forces and other security forces at the federal level and the Oromia Region level. AAA previously published an investigative [report](#) on targeted attacks against ethnic Amharas in Dera Woreda between January and November 2022, during which at least 73 civilians were killed, 6 were injured and 57 were abducted, and thousands were displaced by OLA militants.

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- In another separate incident, a young man was shot and injured in Keraba Kebele of Dera Woreda. Similar to the above incident, the perpetrators of this attack were the ENDF. Regarding the identity of the victim, he is an ethnic Amhara man by the name of Ayayew Zewde. According to information from residents, the victim was younger than 30-years-old.
 - AAA has verified that on May 22nd, 2023, a ethnic Amhara resident of Anger Gutin town (East Wollega Zone) was arbitrarily arrested and severely beaten by Oromia Region Special Forces.
 - On May 20th, 2023, the OLA led an attack on the Fincha Sugar Factory which led to the killing of 14 people.

Update on Mass Arrests

- According to Voice of Amhara media, former workers of INSA and torturers returned to work.⁸ Over 28 ethnic Amhara civilians which were missing for weeks after abduction by security officers were found in an Oromia Special Force camp located in Gelan (Sheger, Oromia Region). Among the detainees were medical doctors from Menelik, Alert and Tor-Hayloch Hospitals. They were accused of attempting a coup d'etat. They told Voice of Amhara that they were tortured for days. Some of the victims' toe and fingernails were forcibly removed by Pinza while being tortured. They were also flogged with electric shock. One of the victims is a woman who was repeatedly beaten by a group which left her with injuries. Now her nose and eye is continuously bleeding and she has yet to receive medical help. They were starved for days. They were interrogated in various ways including putting guns and knives on their necks.

⁸See May 29th, 2023 media [report](#) from Voice of Amhara.

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- The torturers also told them to bow down before the Oromo people and Oromo system or else leave Addis Ababa. They were humiliated on grounds of their ethnicity and were forced to push the walls. One of the torture victims became mentally ill as a result and has lost control of himself. The security forces used various derogatory insults calling them history thieves, Menelik’s leprous, settlers, expansionists, and *kumta* (shorts) wearers. The security forces added,

“We would rather Ethiopia be dismantled than share power with you (Amhara)”,

“Why should you compete with Oromo? You can’t have equal rights with Oromo”,

“We will massacre and erase you all (Amharas) from the land”.

- After May 26, 2023, the torture victims were transferred to the Federal Crime Investigations Office located in the Mexico area of Addis Ababa. Victims reported torture against ethnic Amhara people has continued at the same site.
- The abduction and torture of Amharas is being coordinated by various institutions including the Federal Crime Investigations Office, Information Network Security Administration (INSA), Ethio-Telecom, Addis Ababa Police Commission, Oromia Region Communication Bureau, Oromia Police Commission, Gelan Police Department, Oromo business organizations and businessmen, and the Oromia, Nations and Nationalities Synod.
- Names of 28 ethnic Amhara victims of torture have been identified as follows:

No.	Victim Name	Occupation
1	Biniam Alemayehu	Civil Engineer
2	Melak Misalie	Engineer
3	Dawit Yifru	Police Inspector
4	Gete Amenu	Police Sergeant

5	Getawey Tadesse	Police Commander
6	Awoke Sinshaw	CBE Worker
7	Yimer Mintesinot	Civil Engineer
8	Getaneh Birhanie	Health Officer, Menelik Hospital
9	Abraham Melkamu	Psychiatrist, Alert Hospital
10	Minibel Jegnie	Psychiatrist, Tor-Hayloch Hospital
11	Ermias Mekuria	PhD
12	Debebe Bashah Wured	Businessman
13	Nibret Abeje	Owner, Grocery Store
14	Yilma Bezabih	Office Head, Bole sub-city Rule Enforcement
15	Kidist Kebede	Housewife
16	Fikadu Mengstie	Pharmacist, Zewditu Hospital
17	Andualem Ashagrie	Police Inspector
18	Manaye Ayele	Worker, Private Company
19	Alem Hulum Tenaw	Teacher
20	Merigeta Yisahak Aychew	Church Scholar
21	Getaneh Takele	Worker, Ethiopian Airlines
22	Endalkachew Eshetu	Worker, Sheger Tour Transport Organization
23	Kiber Alemayehu	Engineer
24	Basazin Ergetie	Lion Bus Driver
25	Mebrat Abera	Construction Worker
26	Wubet Akal	Guard
27	Zena Hailu	Construction Worker
28	Solomon Dessie	Accountant

– Sources identified nine key security officials who oversaw the torture against detained Amharas:

No.	Suspect Name	Position
1	Demelash Gebremichael	Federal Police Commission Commissioner
2	Temesgen Tiruneh	INSA Head
3	Melaku Fenta	Crime Prevention Bureau
4	Zelalem Mengistie	Crime Investigations Head
5	Abera Wondie	Operations Department Head
6	Ahmed Abdel	Operations Department Vice-Head
7	Colonel Ibrahim	Commando Special Operation Head
8	Colonel Ichara	Commando Special Operation Vice-Head
9	Vice-Inspector Ifa	Spy Group Leader

- Oromo Prosperity Party official Taye Dendea on his personal social media account admitted that torture is being perpetrated in Oromia Region. He also said the ruling class that controls Oromia Region and Ethiopia is led by a philosophy of conspiracy.
- Three detained journalists, Meskerem Abera, Dawit Begashaw, and Tewodros Asfaw appeared before the Lideta First Instance Court, and the court allowed an additional 15 days to bring charges. Another 8 detained youth were released upon bail.
- Memhir Hailemariam Zewdu appeared before the remand appellate division of the federal high court on Monday, May 22, 2023. Memhir Hailemariam Zewdu, a well-known EOTC religious teacher at Boru Selassie, Ge'ez language instructor at Wollo University, and currently an MA student at Bahir Dar University, was arrested on Friday, May 12, 2023, in Bahir Dar and was taken to Addis Ababa on the same date. On May 15, police brought him before court, and the court remanded him for fourteen days of investigation. However, on May 17, 2023, he appealed to the appellate division of the federal high court, and the division adjourned the case for

May 22, 2023. And finally, on May 22, the high court granted the police 14 days of remand.

- Various Amhara human rights activists, media professionals, members of Amhara Youth Associations, and Fano members who are detained for their critical voices against the Amhara persecution in Ethiopia, including Meskerem Abera, Dawit Begashaw, and Tewdros Asfaw, appeared before the federal high court on May 26, 2023. The court granted the prosecutor 15 days for the preparation of the charge; the police investigation period (remand) is now over. On Meskerem Abera's file, Meskerem Abera herself, Biset Tefera, and Saron Kebaw were all given to the prosecutor 15 days to institute charges. On Dawit Begashaw's file, the prosecutor was given 15 days to institute charges against Dawit Begashaw himself and Tewdros Asfaw. On the Dawit Ababu File, Dawit Ababu, Tewdros Teshome, Andebet Teshager, and Masresha Enyew were similarly given 15 days of charge preparation for the prosecutor. Lastly, the same 15 days were given to those charged on Member Alemu's file, including Member Alemu, a member of the Fano arrested in Gonder, Gebereabe Alemu, and Sisay Melkamu, a member of the Amhara Students Association. On the other hand, for some detainees, such as Yordanos Alemie, Taddele Mengist were remanded for 10 additional days.

Muslim Protests in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- AAA has verified on May 26th, 2023, members of the Muslim community in Addis Ababa organized protests opposing the government's demolitions of several mosques. Many demolitions occurred in the newly established Sheger city administration which was formed by the Oromia Region Government annexing neighborhoods from the outskirts of Addis Ababa city without proper consultation from the public. Following the annexation, tens of thousands of residential houses

and sites of worships (churches and mosques) have been demolished by taskforces organized by the Oromia Region administration.

- According to the *Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Council*, in its press release on May 26th, 2023, the demonstration was legitimate with grounds of denouncing the ongoing destruction of Mosques under the Sheger city administration. The council documented at least 19 Mosques that were demolished in the month of May 2023 alone. The council also reported that police fired on protesters and called the action unconstitutional.
- Protesters gathered in several neighborhoods including near the Anwar and Al-Noor (Benji) Mosques located in the Merkato and Arada (Piassa) areas, respectively.
- Demonstrators voiced several chants including:
 - “*Stop demolishing the house of Allah*”
 - “*Stop targeting Mosques, it is meaningless to have a city without Muslims*”
- In response, Addis Ababa police fired tear gas and bullets to disburse crowds which led to civilian casualties.
- The acts prompted condemnation from the Addis Ababa Islamic Affairs Council which called the actions by police unacceptable, unjust and inhumane.⁹
- According to the Addis Ababa Police Commission, at least two civilians were killed and an additional four sustained physical injuries and were admitted to hospital.¹⁰ In addition, 37 police members and 17 other security personnel sustained injuries following the disturbance near the Merkato area. The police

⁹On May 26, 2023, the Addis Ababa Islamic Affairs Council issued a [statement](#) on its official Facebook page.

¹⁰On May 26, 2023, the Addis Ababa Police Commission issued a [statement](#) on its official Facebook page.

commission also announced arrests of over 114 individuals suspected of organizing the demonstrations. The police commission described the demonstration as unlawful and lacking legitimate grounds, jeopardizing the religious institution and its followers.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



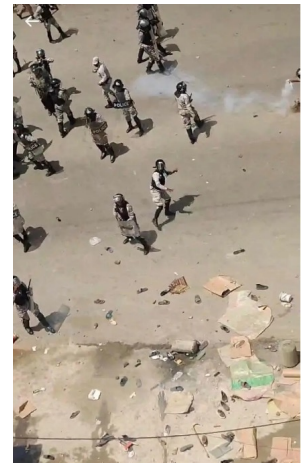
(f)



(g)



(h)



(i)

Figure 1: Photographs capture various scenes of Muslim protests against demolitions of Mosques in Addis Ababa

Update on the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC)

- The holy synod of the EOTC has been in its May Annual Convention from May 9 through to May 24, 2023, in Addis Ababa. Among the agendas presented for the council, the issue of the formerly excommunicated bishops and archbishops of the so-called *Oromia and nation and nationalities* was contentious. Those fathers of the church who are connected with the Oromo Prosperity Party were claiming the synod should reappoint the formerly excommunicated 25 archbishops of the Oromia and nation and nationalities, while fathers who are known for their loyalty to the integrity of the EOTC insisted that the appointment of bishops is left to the wishes of the synod and not something that the government will force to do. As a result of this position, the Oromo Prosperity Party persons were threatening fathers who did not subscribe to the proposal of Oromia Region President Shimelis Abdisa to appoint “*not only a bishop who can speak Oromiffa but a bishop whose blood is pure Oromo*”. The threat was not limited to fathers in the Holy Synod; known scholars and priests of the church, members of Mahibere Kidusan and other spiritual associations who opposed the Abiy Ahmed administration’s policy towards the EOTC in general, and splinter groups of the church to form a synod of “*Oromia and nation and nationalities*” in particular, were subjected to unlawful detentions.
 - To mention instances, on May 15, 2023, a famous EOTC preacher, Deacon Birhanu Admas, known for his scholarly preaching, was arrested from his office and was released on the same date. Deacon Birhanu Admas was continuously objecting to the schism by bishops who moved to establish the Oromia synod as an act that violates the doctrine of the church that teaches to despise tribalism. He is known for critically objecting to the questions these splinter groups are asking in light of the church’s doctrine that there is no such thing as “fair representation in church like the representation we know in

politics.



Figure 2: Deacon Birhanu Admas

- On Sunday, May 21st, 2023, a press statement, whose content criticizes fathers in the synod who were supporting the illegitimate cause of the splinter group led by Abune Sawiros, was read by Mahibere Kidusan Television. Then, immediately, the Ethiopian Media Authority (EMA) announced that it suspended the media's license in complete defiance of Article 73 of the media proclamation number 1238/2021, while it should have provided a written warning if the content was thought to violate the law. This casts a reasonable doubt on the EMA's impartiality and independence, as required under Article 7 of the proclamation. Though the EMA announced on May 27, 2023, that the temporary closure announced was revoked, it is believed that this action reflects the policy of the Prosperity Party against the EOTC. The Prosperity Party is working to instrumentalize the church, for it is thought the church is a problem for Oromizing the country under the ideology of Oromumma. Among the three individuals who read the statement that led to the suspension of Mahibere Kidusan Television's license, two were arrested. Qesis Aklilu Damtew, chief of the committee, was immediately arrested on Monday, May 22, 2022, and

was brought before the court after two days on May 24, 2023. It is reported that police suspected the priest of *“inciting violence and unrest in an attempt to forcefully overthrow the constitutional order, providing weapons so that various political forces could undergo military training, and conspiring to destroy the country.”* It is unacceptable to think that a servant of God would engage in any activities that would destroy his country. The court finally granted the police 12 days of remand for further investigation. The other person among the three men who read the statement on television, Memhir Teshome Beyene, who was secretary of the committee and the Petrosawiyan Association, was abducted on Tuesday, May 23, 2023.



Figure 3: at the Middle is Memhir Teshome Beyene, the secretary, and left to him is Qesis Aklilu Damtew

- On the other hand, other servants of the church who are not related to the statement read on Mahibere Kidusan Television were arrested this past week. Megabi Birhanat, Qesis Muluken Birhanu, Mahbere Kidusan’s vice-chief of public relations, was abducted on May 24, 2023, and later released on the next day, May 25, 2023. Deacon Yonas, who is known for providing information about the current affairs of the church on social media, was also arrested. A known Qine Memhir at Salete Mihret, Memhir Firew Asgie, was also abducted on May 26, 2023, and it is

not known right now where he is being held.



(a) Deacon Yonas

(b) Qesis Muluken Birhanu

Figure 4

Update from Balderas for True Democracy Party

- On May 25th, 2023, Balderas for True Democracy (Balderas) party issued a press release concerning current political developments in Ethiopia. The press release condemned the Prosperity Party's move to Oromize Addis Ababa city, the federal capital of Ethiopia. The statement mentioned that, with a view to instilling the spirit of Oromummaa, the Prosperity Party is undertaking massive construction of buildings for Oromo/Oromia Region institutions, including:
 - 1.8 billion ETB Oromia Supreme Court Building
 - 1.5 billion ETB Oromia Mass Media Agency Building
 - 1 billion ETB Oromo Wrestling Building
 - 700 million ETB worth of Oromia Police Commission Building
- Balderas also mentioned that the Prosperity Party is meddling in the affairs of the country's major religious communities including followers of the EOTC and the

Islamic faith. It cited the recent suspension of Mahibere Kidusan's Television license and ongoing demolitions of Mosques in the Sheger City Administration as examples.¹¹ It concluded by mentioning that the Prosperity Party's interference in religion is to mitigate fears these institutions could challenge the ruling party's plans to impose its Oromuma (Oromo supremacist) ideology in Ethiopia.

Update from Enat Party

- On May 22, 2023, opposition party Enat released a press statement regarding the current political situation in Ethiopia.¹² The party condemned the Prosperity Party for meddling in the internal affairs of the EOTC in violation of the principle of secularism enshrined under Article 11 of the FDRE Constitution.
- In its statement, Enat stated that the splinter group that was challenging the EOTC since January 22nd, 2023 (the time when the three bishops announced that they anointed 26 archbishops under the Oromia, Nations and Nationalities Synod) was totally political and not doctrinal, and it was fully sponsored by the Prosperity Party. And when that project was not a success, it moved to meddle in the Holy Synod's May Annual Convention between May 9-16, 2023, to force members of the Holy Synod to appoint bishops of "*pure Oromo blood*" in violation of the church's doctrine which does not focus on ethnicity.

Update from Ezema Party

- Ezema members and top leaders left the party due to party top leadership's ill-position of backing the abuses of the ruling party on the people. The members and leaders leaving the party include Yeshiwas Assefa, Nansi Wudineh, Habtamu

¹¹As of May 26th, 2023 the Ethiopian Media Authority lifted the temporary suspension of Mahibere Kidusan Television in a [press release](#).

¹²On May 22nd, 2023, opposition party Enat released a press statement on its official [Facebook page](#).

Kitaba, Tekle Bekele, and Daniel Shibesh. The ex-leader of the party, Andualem Aragie also resigned weeks before.

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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