Ethnically motivated evictions in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: “We are evicted because of our Amhara identity”

Amhara Association of America (AAA) is deeply concerned about the forced eviction and demolition of the homes of thousands of Amharas from the area known as “Bole homes” in Bole Sub city, Addis Ababa, where many had lived between 10 to 30 years. AAA confirms from its field visit and interviews with victims that Addis Ababa City Administration forcibly and violently evicted more than 370 Amhara households from the area known as ‘Bole homes,’ allegedly to make way for a government project. It also notes that the forced evictions and demolitions of homes were carried out on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 and without any consultation, adequate notice, compensation or alternative housing being offered to those affected and with recourse to use of force, leaving them in a serious humanitarian crisis and transgressing many of their human rights.

AAA spoke to 10 evicted people from multiple households to prepare this report, all of whom had a similar story of being made homeless and losing almost all their belongings, because of their Amhara identity. For instance, Yimam Mohammed, whose house was demolished to the ground, said “I’ve been here since 2005 without anyone saying anything. However, on 16 February 2021, at approximately 6am, the City officials and dozens of police officers arrived at our village, forcibly evicted us and destroyed our home of 15 years. My homes were destroyed despite the fact that I showed them a copy of a court order (issued by Lideta First Instance Court), which was supposed to restrain the authorities from demolishing my house.” He further indicated that the eviction is ethnically
motivated, saying “a week before the actual demolition officials of the city came and ethnically profiled all residents.” According to Yimam, defining the problem as a mere eviction of “illegal settlers” is simplistic; it is an ethnic cleansing of Amharans from Addis Ababa. “We are evicted because of our Amhara identity,” said Yimam. Left homeless and destitute overnight, Yimam is now living in a small, leased room along with his wife and four children [they’re all under 12 years of age].

Pictures: Yimam’s family celebrating birthday in their house before its demolition
Another evictee, Eshetu Tessema, whose 3 houses were bulldozed by the city administration, said the evictions were carried out without due notice and in a ruthless manner. “They had destroyed my homes, where I had sheltered since 2011, thereby ruining my life,” adding “I built the homes through huge exhaustion and suffering.” He also said he thought they were targeted because of their ethnicity, noting that profiling of all Bole homes’ residents was carried out by officials of the city a week before the demolition.

Similarly, Shimels Beze, a father of six (all of whom are under 18 years of age), said the city administration razed his two homes to the ground using a bulldozer, further alleging that he was not consulted about the eviction or provided with any alternative. Shimels averred, “they demolished my houses that I built with my entire money mercilessly,
though I have lived in the area ['Bole homes] since 2006”. He said he too believes they were evicted because of their Amhara identity, asking "why did the city officials engage in ethnic profiling of residents just a week before the actual demolition if they didn't have any intentions to hurt us.”

Another evictee, Gezahagne Workineh, said “we lost our houses and all our belongings just because of our identity”, reiterating that he and his family were asked which ethnic group they are identified with, “I am extremely concerned about the fate of my two children. Where will we go,” Gezahagne said as his eyes filled with tears. He further asked “why did the city officials fail to assess the impact of the forced eviction on children’s access to education,” adding “they are senseless.”

AAA also confirms from its sources, including Eshetu Tessema, Fikru Nigussie, Werkneh Bitew and Yimam Mohammed, that the city administration has promised to give a modest compensation for four evictees. However, the criterions to select the beneficiaries remain unclear.

In light of the above, AAA strongly believes that the forced evictions transgress, directly and indirectly, various rights of the evictees and their families as enshrined under global and regional human rights instruments to which Ethiopia is a party, including: the right to housing and the right not to be subjected to arbitrary eviction, the right to be protected from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence, the right to be free from cruel and inhuman treatment, the right to food, water and sanitation, the right to health, the right to education and the right to property. AAA has also reason to believe that the Ethiopian government, particularly the city administration, has used housing demolition and displacement as a weapon of war against ethnic Amharas,
thereby violates its obligation not to discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of ethnicity.

**Recommendation**

Ethiopia is a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and other global and regional human rights treaties, which require it to realize the right to adequate housing and to prevent and refrain from carrying out forced evictions and not discriminate based on ethnicity. Accordingly, AAA urges the government of Ethiopia to:

- Set up an independent body to investigate the forced evictions, compensate those families whose houses were demolished, and ensure they are provided with alternative housing;
- Implement a moratorium on mass evictions until the Addis Ababa Municipal City Administration has regulations and directives in place that ensure evictions comply with Ethiopia’s international and regional human rights commitments;
- Publicly and explicitly condemn the forced evictions of Amharas from Addis Ababa, particularly ‘Bole homes;’
- Act firmly against any discriminatory practices in eviction decisions and hold accountable individuals and groups who led the ethnically motivated evictions against Amhara residents of Addis Ababa;
- Act firmly against local measures denying residence to and unlawful expulsion of Amharas;
- Take meaningful measures towards guaranteeing security of tenure for all residents of the city.
Further, AAA would like to call on human rights organizations and the international community to condemn the forced evictions of Amharas from Addis Ababa and join hands with AAA in calling the government to refrain, and protect people, from forced evictions.
Pictures: The ruins of demolished houses in the area known as ‘Bole homes’. 24 February 2021 ©Amhara Association of America