



## ***“They Stole Our Tears” - The Agamsa Massacre of Amharas: Victims branded Victimizers [English Version]***

### **Introduction**

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) tasked its team of human rights investigators to conduct an investigation into the massacre reported in Agamsa town, Amuru Woreda (district), Horo Guduru Wollega Zone in Ethiopia’s Oromia Region, an area where ethnic-based massacres targetting Amhara residents has been carried out widely. AAA’s team of investigators collected 33 first-hand accounts from survivors, victims’ families, and eyewitnesses of the Agamsa massacre between Monday, August 29 and Thursday, September 8, 2022. This report presents a summary of human rights violations, identities of victims, perpetrators, and details of the attack which transpired in and around Agamsa town.

### **Major Findings of the Investigation**

- According to the findings of the investigation conducted by AAA, the town of Agamsa in Amuru Woreda of Horo Guduru Wollega Zone (Oromia Region, Ethiopia) was under the control of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) [also known as Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) Shene] on Monday, August 29, 2022 during which it perpetrated

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an ethnic-based massacre of Amhara civilians. During this period, the OLA were supported by local Qeerro (extremist Oromo youth) and some ethnic Oromo militiamen who went door-to-door seeking out ethnic Amhara residents and conducted a campaign of systematic killing using various means and weapons. As a result of the killing spree by OLA and its collaborators, at least 50 Amhara residents were killed and an additional 20 Amharas were abducted from Agamsa town on Monday, August 29, 2022 and an additional 11 Amharas were killed in neighboring areas for a total of 61 Amharas killed.

- Following the OLA occupation and reports of ethnic-based killings, residents of nearby towns scrambled to find help from the Oromia Regional Government and the Ethiopian Federal Government. When their pleas fell on deaf ears, farmers from neighbouring towns with relatives in Agamsa quickly organized to respond to the cries for help. They approached the town of Agamsa in the early morning on Tuesday, August 30, 2022. At this time, the OLA was already aware of their approach and opened fire. The OLA was accompanied by Qeerro and a few armed Oromia Regional Government officials. The exchange of gunfire persisted for hours and both sides sustained heavy losses and injuries. In addition, no more than 10 Oromo non-combatants were struck and killed by stray bullets.
- Following the exchange of fire, it was possible to partially free the kidnapped Amharas and they were made to leave the city, but the OLA militants and their collaborators returned to the city at night of that day (Tuesday, August 30, 2022) and killed any Amharas who did not flee, as well as anyone married to an Amhara or who was mixed (Amhara parentage on one side). However, AAA was not able to complete its investigation on the killings committed after August 30, 2022 due to telecommunications issues and displacement of residents.

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## Detailed Findings of the Investigation

**The Oromia Special Forces stationed in Agamsa town exposed Amharas to massacre as they deliberately misinformed them about their sudden evacuation.**

Survivors told the Amhara Association of America (AAA) that the attack happened following the sudden and unexplained departure of the Oromia Special Forces (OSF) that were stationed in Agamsa town (Amuru Woreda, Horo Guduru Wollega Zone, Oromia Region, Ethiopia). The OSF withdrew from the area at approximately 7 p.m. on Sunday, August 28, 2022. Eyewitnesses confirmed that the residents noticed the OSF members were packing up their belongings earlier in the day. Anxious at the imminent danger to their lives since the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) was known to be camped nearby, several Amhara residents approached the OSF and pleaded for them to stay and offer protection. As a last resort, the residents begged to be allowed to flee and leave with the OSF. The OSF Commanding Officers told the residents that only a portion of the OSF was leaving, the rest would remain and that the safety of residents was not in danger (i.e. assurance they would have protection). The Amhara residents returned and calmed the panicked residents that were packing their things to flee, convincing them there was no need to worry as they would be given protection. However, the OSF went back on its word and completely evacuated in the early evening of Sunday, August 28, 2022. A 30-year-old survivor fleeing to a nearby kebele and a member of the initial group that spoke to the OSF recalls the interaction with the OSF and the overall situation as follows:

*“All the things that happen to us are saddening. A lot of us have lost several family members as a result of the attacks that happen on the very land we were born and raised in. Those of us who have survived live above the dead but below the living. We live in fear with our heads down. The OSF knowing Shene (OLA) is waiting to eliminate us started packing up their belongings on Sunday (August 30, 2022) afternoon. All the Amhara residents that noticed*

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*started frantically packing and scrambling to leave. A couple of us talked to some community elders and approached the OSF. We got down on our knees and begged them to stay. If they had to leave, we begged for safe passage to flee to another Amhara majority town. The officials dismissed us by saying ‘Why would we leave unprotected here when we know Shene (OLA) is nearby?’ ‘Only a part of the OSF is leaving, the rest will stay to protect you. Trusting the response of the Special Forces, my friends and the elders who were with me went back to the residents and tried to calm down Amharas who were preparing to leave the town.’”*

However, the source continued to explain that since he knows similar promises were broken by OSF in the past he stayed on and asked them to take the elderly [who would not be able to leave easily if an attack erupts] to the next town along with their armed forces. Although the OSF promised they would take his elderly family members, he explains how they did not honour their promise:

*“When they told us there would be a fraction of the OSF that will stay to protect us, I had my doubts. Especially considering what has happened in the past. However, the leaving faction of the OSF had agreed to give safe passage to some of our elders and community members that were not able-bodied and who could not run incase of an attack. I had expected them to at least keep that promise. We packed their belongings and began waiting for the OSF to leave in the late afternoon. In the early evening, at about 7 p.m., following the dusk, I began to hear trucks leaving the town. I immediately used my flashlight to confirm it was OSF trucks. I started signaling them using the protocol they showed me to remind them to pick up the elders they had promised to give free passage to. However, none of the trucks stopped and they continued to leave the town. I am certain they were aware it was me. No one would be on this side of the road using a flashlight to signal. If it was any other day, they would*

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*have approached me and accused me of disturbing the peace. They didn't even have their headlights on. It is clear that they had sentenced us to death. They broke their promise to the people and completely evacuated in the dark.”*

Five other survivors of the attack and two residents that lost family members in the attack provided similar accounts to AAA. They expressed their frustration not only at the evacuation of the OSF hours before the attack but also at the deliberate disinformation spread by the OSF. The false promise that a part of the OSF would remain to help residents gave them false security and prevented them from fleeing for safety. Several other news outlets have also reported that the OSF evacuated the town of Agamsa on Sunday, August 28, 2022<sup>123</sup>. However, several media reports distorted details of the massacre and misreported the identities of the victims and perpetrators.

### **The immediate invasion by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) following the evacuation of the Oromia Special Forces (OSF)**

All AAA sources have confirmed that the residents began to hear gunshots approximately less than in one hour after the Oromia Special Forces (OSF) trucks evacuated intentionally misleading Amhara residents. The residents suspected the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) had entered the town and confirmed their suspicions in the morning when they found themselves surrounded. Hundreds managed to flee to neighbouring towns in the East Wollega Zone of the Oromia Region. Another AAA source, a 20-year-old, was among the hundreds of displaced Amharas who fled to nearby kebeles to survive the attacks, and recalled the incident as follows:

*“When you look at the time the OSF left and the time Shene (OLA) arrived, it seems like they called and invited OLA to the town. Less than an hour after*

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<sup>1</sup>Reuters (September 3, 2022) - Gunmen kill more than 40 people in Ethiopia's Oromiya region -residents

<sup>2</sup>DW Amharic (September 4, 2022) - Clash in Horo Guduru Wollega Zone Amuru Woreda

<sup>3</sup>BBC Amharic (September 11, 2022) - Many civilians killed by militants in Horo Guduru Wollega

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*the OSF left we started hearing gunshots coming from every direction. I had no doubt it was the Shene (OLA). I told myself I would have a better chance of surviving if I was at church instead of at home, so I headed to the Selassie Church at Agamsa. However, I was wrong. In the early morning, the Shene (OLA) stormed the church and shot two elderly servants of the church who were in the church compound and abducted the six of us who were inside the church.”*

When asked by AAA investigators how the witness was sure the armed forces were members of the OLA, the witness replied all residents of the area are very familiar with OLA due to the repeated attacks in the area. In addition to their characteristic plaited hair and uniform, the attackers identified themselves to locals at a gathering at a local school that they are “fighters of the OLA and they are the new government moving forward”.

Similarly a mother of three children, who said that she was around 35-years-old, was a resident of Godomaro, a town on the periphery of Agamsa, who was displaced to Haro Kebele due to the attack said that she witnessed the OLA had taken over the city:

*“After the Special Forces left the city on Sunday night (August 28, 2022), when we woke up the next morning, we were under the control of Shene[...]. There was loud dancing (celebrations) and gunfire. I was afraid that they would kill us, so I closed my door together with my three children (two of them were 3 and 5-years-old). At about seven o’clock in the morning, an Oromo resident of the city called Alemayehu, whom I knew before, came with another stranger and said, ‘come out and meet the new government with your children.’ They kicked us out of my house and took us to the main street of the town where [OLA] a group of Shene soldiers were waiting for us. Once there, we were among 20 other Amhara residents like us who had been taken out from their houses.”*

Another survivor, a man in his early thirties and among the hundreds of Amhara resi-

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dents that were detained in the school compound recalls the attack as follows:

*“I live in Kebele 03 with my wife and child. When the OSF left on Sunday evening (August 28, 2022), the Shene (OLA) came in and spent the night. When we woke up on Monday [August 29] morning, the entire town was terrified. Radical Oromo youth (Qeeroo) were celebrating the arrival of Shene (OLA). They were celebrating by firing into the sky, robbing banks and shops, and shooting and abducting Amharas. I was already aware Shene (OLA) had blocked all exits from the town. I knew my only option was to await my family’s and my own fate staying at home in silence. At approximately 8 a.m. the next morning, around 10 OLA members and several Qeeroo I grew up with stormed our house. They made us to stand outside of the house and started robbing anything they could find in the house. They started whipping us with electrical wires. They later marched us to a nearby private residence where another Amhara family of five was being held.”*

Similar to the others the witness was also certain the assailants were members of the OLA. He recounted their characteristic hairstyle, uniform, and the obvious signs that they have been in the woods for a long period of time. He added the perpetrators themselves readily self-identified as members of the OLA who were there to “*free Oromia*”. He also said the Qeeroo who were sympathetic to the OLA engaged in the looting of banks and Amhara properties.

A 68-year-old worshipper at the Selassie Church in Agamsa told AAA the OLA dragged him and his two children to an elementary school compound near the Ethio Telecom station<sup>4</sup>. The survivor recalls the OLA member saying, “*Oromia is now free and the fate of Amhara people will be determined by the Oromo people*”. The witness and his two children managed to survive the attack. However, he says the dark day had come for many

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<sup>4</sup>Ethio Telecom is a state-operated service provider for communications services in Ethiopia

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other Amhara civilians who were murdered in gruesome ways. He says the whereabouts of several others are still unknown.

AAA spoke to six other residents of Agamsa who escaped and fled to the nearby town of Haro and corroborated these accounts. The OLA entered the town of Agamsa in the late evening of Sunday, August 28, 2022. The following morning the OLA along with radical Oromo youth (Qeerro) indiscriminately killed Amhara residents and destroyed Amhara businesses.

The withdrawal of the OSF from Agamsa town and the immediate entry of the OLA into Agamsa have also been reported by media outlets <sup>5</sup>. However, as detailed below media outlets that covered the incident disappointingly did not report OLA and local Qeerro identity based killing of more than 61 Amharas through house-to-house searches and about the fate of several Amharas who were detained after their phones were taken away from them, being told Oromos people will decide on their fate.

### **Identity-based human rights violations committed by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) during the occupation of Agamsa Town**

Sources told AAA that following the arrival of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) late Sunday evening (August 28, 2022) there were mixed feelings among the residents of Agamsa town. Some Oromo residents were elated while the Amhara residents were overwhelmed with terror. Sources told AAA the Qeerro (radical Oromo youth) took to the streets to welcome the OLA and started celebrating. In parallel, the Amhara residents who were all too familiar with the repeated massacres against Amharas by the OLA, were silently awaiting their death. The Qeerro accompanied the OLA in robbing banks and destroying Amhara-owned businesses. The Qeerro also played a primary role in rounding up Amhara residents for killings and detaining them.

The AAA talked to a man in his late twenties who managed to escape to the town of

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<sup>5</sup>[DW Amharic \(September 4, 2022\) - Clash in Horo Guduru Wollega Zone Amuru Woreda](#)



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Jabo Debon. The witness whose father was murdered in his home at Klisher, Agamsa during the attack recounts the situation as follows:

*“Everything that happened was very saddening. The Qeeroo and some local Oromo police officers joined Shene (OLA) in killing and abducting Amharas. They also helped destroy Amhara businesses. They began the attack after shutting down all roads out of Agamsa, so escape became impossible. A couple of us hid inside our crop stalks. The rest awaited death inside their homes. On the day of the attack, my father insisted on staying and protecting his home in Klisher, Agamsa. He was accompanied by a friend. At noon, a local Oromo official named Dereje Shifferaw and other officials came to our house. My father recognized them as government officials and did not suspect they will kill them. His friend told me they shot my father in the chest when he approached them to ask them what they wanted. His friend miraculously escaped and joined us in hiding. Upon hearing the news, my brothers and I returned to my father’s house in Klisher and buried his body in the woods near Selassie Church. We quickly went back into hiding inside the maize stalks.”*

The witness also mentions several Amhara residents were killed or abducted.

*“On my way back from burying my father, in the small part of town of Klisher alone I saw the dead bodies of more than 10 Amharas including Lingerew Gashaye, Chale Getahun, Bayeh Jenberu, Meles (last name unknown), Menge (last name unknown), and Bamlaku (last name unknown).”*

The witness mentioned among the dead Lingerew Gashaye was a day laborer in his 40s. The OLA had used a machete to behead him and left his remains on a road in Kebele 01 of Klisher. He saw Chale Getahun, a laborer in his late thirties, and Menge, a cattle farmer in his forties, also beheaded. The witness also told AAA that daily laborers Bayeh Jenberu and Meles had been shot dead.

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A woman in her thirties told AAA, that on early Monday (August 29, 2022) morning “men with braided hair” approached her home located near the elementary school in Agamsa. She describes her encounter as follows:

*“It happened around 7 a.m. on Monday (August 29, 2022). I, my husband Chale Getahun, and my five-year-old daughter Habtam Chale were inside our home. Then suddenly armed men with braided hair entered our home. They then dragged him (her husband Chale) out of the house. They used a machete to behead him as my daughter and I were watching.”*

The witness said she does not remember what happened after. She suddenly found herself in the woods running for her life. She managed to escape to the nearby town of Haro. She does not have any information on the whereabouts of her 5-year-old daughter including whether her child is alive or not.

AAA also talked to a 26-year-old survivor who served as a preacher in Agamsa Selassie Church. He told AAA the OLA killed an elderly clergy member by the name of Merigeta Yitayih who is about 80-years-old. The OLA also shot and killed a 65-year-old servant of the church Emahoy (Mother) Chekolech. He recalls the event as follows:

*“When I heard Shene (OLA) had controlled the city Sunday (August 28, 2022) evening, I immediately went to hide in the church. I spent the night inside the chapel with others like me who had come to hide in the church. We didn’t leave the chapel the next morning. We were scared they would kill us if they saw us in the church compound. Merigeta Yetayih and Emahoy Chekolech despite being ethnic Amharas assumed the OLA would spare them because they were elderly. They went about their daily tasks in the church compound with other Oromo worshippers of the church. At approximately 7 a.m. I heard some noise outside. I started following what was going through a crack on the wall of the chapel. I saw the OLA shoot and kill Emahoy Chekolech and Meirgeta Yetayih.*

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*They stormed inside the chapel and found six of us there. As they were about to kill us, some Oromo servants of the church intercepted and begged ‘kill us before you kill them’. The OLA then told us ‘The Oromo people will decide your fate’ and dragged us to an elementary school near Tele. There we were joined by about one hundred Amharas that were being held.”*

The witness added the OLA buried Merigeta Yitayih and Emahoy Chekolech’s dead bodies near a Protestant Church located about 100 meters away. The witness added he had seen more than 50 dead bodies and was able to identify 20 of them.

*“Without including those that are missing there are more than 50 Amharas killed. I have witnessed the dead bodies of a couple of people I have known personally. Mebratu Birilew (in his 60s), Guade Beyene (a man who was in his 40s and beheaded with a machete), Bekalu Masresha (a day laborer in his 40s), Tile Getinet (a youth and resident of Agamsa), Emahoy Chekolech Bezabih (Silassie Church Servant), Merigeta Yihayih Alemneh (Clergyman at Silassie Church), a 50-year-old cattle herder by the name of Menge and his wife Ema Tsehay. I saw the bodies of three low-income employees of an Oromo-owned cattle farm, Dinku, Feleke, and Aba Kere. I saw the body of Melaku Shifferaw. These are only the names of the people I was able to identify. As I was escaping Agamsa, I saw bodies of people that were shot dead and beheaded at every turn. I was not able to identify many of them.”*

An elderly resident of Haro town told AAA he lost a close relative by the name of Melaku Shifferaw during the Agamsa attack. Melaku was severely beaten with an axe and rocks. He was brought to Haro town on a stretcher. However, there was no medical help available to him and he died as a result of his injuries. The man recounts the event as follows:

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*“Monday morning (August 29, 2022), I heard the news that they were surrounded by Shene (OLA). As I feared they brought him to me saying they had entered his house and beaten him with an axe and rocks. I asked about his wife and kids. They told me except for one of his children they had seen the beheaded bodies of his wife and kids where they found him. What can I say? Who can I call out to? He was barely alive when they brought him. He was covered in blood. I don’t know what kind of evil it was. They had even cut off his ears. I did not know what to do. There is no doctor or medical center here. It has been two years since we (Haro residents) received any medical service. It’s been two years since we have been surrounded by Shene (OLA). He passed away as I scrambled to find help. I had him buried at Saint George’s Church the next morning. I have been sitting in sorrow ever since.”*

Based on survivor accounts the AAA was able to identify at least 50 Amhara residents who were killed in the Agamsa attack and at least 11 Amhara residents were killed in neighboring areas. The names of the 61 Amhara victims identified at the time of this report are listed below.

List of Amhara residents killed by the Oromo Liberation Army during their occupation of Agamsa town and surrounding areas (Amuru Woreda, Horo Guduru Wollega Zone, Oromia Region, Ethiopia).

No	Name of deceased victim	Age	Sex
1	Merigeta Yitayih Alemneh	80s	Male
2	Emahoy Chekolech Bezabih	65	Female
3	Bamlak (Bamle) Shifferaw	50	Male
4	Mebratu Birilew	60	Male
5	Lingerew Gashaye	38	Male
6	Chale Getaneh	36	Male

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7	Misawa Kasew	30s	Female
8	Fekede (Misawa's Child)	Minor	Male
9	Shanko (Misawa's Child)	Minor	Male
10	Belete Kassaw (Misawa's Sister)		Female
11	Guade Beyene	41	Male
12	Birhanu Getinet	32	Male
13	Tile Getinet	27	Male
14	Getinet Tegegne	60	Male
15	Bekalu Masresha	50s	Male
16	Sisay Addisu	34	Male
17	Zelalem Yirko (Part Oromo)	28	Male
18	Atalay Meles	37	
19	Wonde (Father's name unknown)		Male
20	Ema Mosit (Wonde's Wife)		Female
21	Mita Wonde (Child of Wonde and Mosit)	Minor	Female
22	Getu Wonde (Child of Wonde and Mosit)	Minor	Male
23	Asmare Belsiti	40	Male
24	Banchu Assefa	38	Female
25	Adane Bamlaku	19	Male
26	Ristu Bamlaku	15	Male
27	Alehegne Bamlaku	12	Male
28	Hassan Yimer (Resident of Obora)		Male
29	Mitiku (Resident of Obora)		Male
30	Getasew Sitotaw	32	Male
31	Alemnew Mekonen	40	Male
32	Abiye Kassaye	19	Male
33	Alamir Tarekegn	33	Male

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34	Aba Feleke	70s	Male
35	Nigus Dagnaw	30s	Male
36	Aba Kere	Above 60	Male
37	Ale Belay		Male
38	Bayih Animaw	37	Male
39	Dinku Endeshaw	50	Male
40	Meles Kassahun	27	Male
41	Meles Endeshaw	30s	Male
42	Emahoy Tsehay	60s	Female
43	Menge Bamlaku		Male
44	Ayengew Endeshaw	20	Male
45	Fentaw Tamene	51	Male
46	Adane Mekonen	40	Male
47	Tsega Asmare	42	Female
48	Ale Simachew	35	Male
49	Tarike Semahegn	25	Male
50	Markesh Gashaw	Above 30	Male
51	Birhanu Ergete	Above 25	Male
52	Kindenew Worku	Above 30	Male
53	Wondimneh Tilahun	Above 30	Male
54	Kassahun Desalehu	Above 30	Male
55	Fante Abebaw	Above 25	Male
56	Sisay Ferede	Above 30	Male
57	Molla Birku	Above 30	Male
58	Mulat Asnakew	Above 30	Male
59	Jenberu Takelegn	Above 30	Male
60	Girma (Father's name unknown)		Male

***“What should we do with them?”: Amhara residents taken to concentration camps and put on public trial with death penalty***

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) has confirmed that on Monday, August 29, 2022, hundreds of Amhara residents of Agamsa town were rounded up from their homes, churches and various hiding places by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and its collaborators and were held captive in makeshift concentration camps. Survivors told AAA that in addition to the derogatory verbal and physical assaults they endured, they were also under heavy psychological stress as they expected to be killed at any moment. One survivor and an elderly clergy member at Agamsa Selassie Church recounts his experience as follows:

*“They took me and my two children from our home. I asked and pleaded ‘What wrong did we do?’ ‘How have we wronged you?’ They continued to beat us with a hose and dragged us to a school around the Tele (Ethio Telecom Office). They called us names for hours and beat us now and then. They told us our fate will be determined by the Oromo people. The youth of the city were giving us dirty looks and insulting us so we had no hope of surviving. I told God ‘Do as you wish’ and awaited my fate.”*

A man the survivor described as “*Leader of the Shene (OLA)*” had later declared out loud that “*Oromo and Oromia are free*”. The leader motioned at the hundreds of imprisoned Amhara residents and asked the Oromo residents “*What should we do with them?*”. The survivor told AAA an argument broke out between Qeerro that wanted the prisoners dead and Oromo elders that asked, “*What did they do?*”. The survivor said after a long argument they were set free.

A 35-year-old mother of three and survivor of the concentration camp told AAA that at approximately 7 a.m. on Monday, August 29, 2022, strangers stormed her house. They told

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her “*Come out with your children and meet the new government*”. The witness told AAA that the OLA dragged her three children and her to a road next to Techale Welane Hotel. There they joined about 20 other Amhara prisoners. The victim recounts the incident as follows:

*“As we were sitting by the road near Techale Welane Hotel, they were calling us names and hitting us. The militiamen insulted us saying ‘you donkeys’ and ‘dirt’. They hit us with electric cables. The Oromo youth that was going around the city celebrating would kick us. They said things like ‘Amharas your day is over. You’ll go back to Gojjam barefooted like the day you came’. They would throw stones at us. When the qeeroos (radical Oromo youth) got too aggressive the militia guards put us inside a private home nearby. Around 1 or 2 p.m. they took us to a school. The militiamen asked the people (Oromo residents) what they should do with us. The qeeroos said we should be killed but the elders suggested we should be free, and they freed us.”*

The survivor told AAA that Qeeroo and some OLA members were upset over the decision to release the residents from the concentration camp. The survivor was scared they might come to her house to kill her, so she spent the night at a neighbor’s house. The next day on Tuesday, August 30, 2022, she fled to the town of Haro.

*“When they freed us from the school the qeeroos and some Shene (OLA) were upset and yelling. As we left the school, they were following and threatening us. I don’t know if it’s to rob us after we die or to settle personal grievances but moments later, I noticed Qeeroo’s organizing in every street. They were joined by some Shene (OLA) and monitored our movement. I feared if I slept at home, they’d come to kill my children and I. I spent the night at my (Oromo) neighbor’s home and fled for Haro in the morning.”*



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A survivor in his 30s who had managed to flee to the nearby town of Jebo Deben recounted this experience to AAA as follows:

*“In the house I was detained in with my wife and child, there were 5 members of another family. Until we were taken to the school, they (OLA) took turns beating us with electrical cables. They told us ‘This country belongs to Oromos. If you refuse to go back to where you came from, you will receive your price. We will not live with dirt.’ They spit at us and called us other nasty things.”*

The survivor told AAA despite their release after being detained for hours, he had noticed the assailants were going door-to-door so was forced to flee to a nearby town.

*“Even though we were released, the insults, threats, killings, and looting did not stop. I told myself I would rather take my chances than see my wife and child killed in front of me. So, with the help of my friend who is part Oromo and part Amhara, we left the town in the dark. Praise be to the lord we are now in Jebo Deben Kebele.”*

“It was not my day to die so I cheated death twice,” a 26-year-old survivor and clergy member of Selassie Church in Agamsa told AAA.

*“When I think about everything it seems like a dream. When they found me at Selassie Church in the morning, I thought it was the end for sure. I was sure because these were hands that did not hesitate to kill church elders like Emahoy Chekolech and Merigeta Yitayih. By no means did I think they would back away from killing a young man like me. But the lord wanted me to live so instead of killing me on the spot they (OLA) told me I would stand trial in front of the Oromo people and took us to the school. At around 2 p.m. they debated whether we should be killed or released. It was the lord’s wish that we were freed so we were released in the end.”*

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The AAA’s investigation has found that following the OLA’s attack on the town of Agamsa on Monday, August 29, 2022, many Amharas went missing. There were several that were detained but were not brought forward for “public trial” near the school. The AAA was able to identify the names of 20 Amharas that have been missing since Monday, August 29, 2022.

Names of Amhara residents of Agamsa that have been missing since the OLA’s attack on Monday, August 29, 2022.

No	Name	Age	Sex
1	Misge Simagn	39	Male
2	Fetene (Father’s name unconfirmed)	31	Female
3	Shewaye Misge	18	Female
4	Mulu Misge	13	Female
5	Abuye Misge	8	Male
6	Degu (Father’s name unconfirmed)	31	Male
7	Habtam Hassan	25	Female
8	Burte Degu	13	Female
9	Leka Degu	8	Female
10	Abi Degu	6	Male
11	Mita Degu	4	Female
12	Zewdu Demoz	41	Male
13	Tesfaye (Father’s name unconfirmed)	32	Female
14	Agegnew (Father’s name unconfirmed)	35	Female
15	Mesti Ayenew	18	Female
16	Belsti Ayenew	16	Male
17	Beletu Ayenew	13	Female
18	Mita Ayenew	10	Female
19	Abdi Ayenew	7	Male

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**Confrontation on Tuesday, August 30, 2022, in Agamsa town and the lives that perished as a result**

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) investigation shows that several of the media and news reports on the Agamsa attack are not aligned with the realities on the ground. The reports are based on deliberate misinformation and false narratives created by Oromo nationalists. The AAA is disappointed to see such careless reporting on the vulnerable Amhara communities that are repeated victims of ethnic-based massacres and denial of justice.

Among the false media accounts, one is that on Tuesday, August 30, 2022, “Fano” opened fire in the town of Agamsa and killed more than 60 Oromo residents. The AAA has investigated several of the countless Amhara massacres in the different zones of western Oromia Region. As a result, the AAA is familiar with the suppression of reports on Amhara massacres in the region and the campaign to villainize the victims of the massacres, making them even more vulnerable to attacks. This orchestrated misinformation is a tool used by Oromo nationalists (including political parties and media agencies), the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), and elements of the Oromia Regional Government with the common goal to cleanse the Oromia Region of Amharas. The AAA is alarmed to see several celebrated media and news outlets become victims of the ruse. Consequently, the AAA has been thoroughly investigating the incident for quite some time.

The results of the investigation show that following the occupation of Agamsa town by the OLA a range of gross human rights violations were perpetrated by the OLA and radical Oromo youth. The attacks targeted Amhara residents exclusively and there was no security force present to respond to the residents’ cries for help. The residents pleaded with the nearby towns for help and called for rescue. On Monday, August 29, 2022, elders from nearby towns approached the OLA and asked them to stop killing Amhara residents and

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permitted them to leave the town. They were informed they had no right to make demands in a town the OLA governs. The OLA said:

*“We (OLA) are free to do as we please and if you (nearby town residents) have the guts come to free them yourself.” The response came at approximately noon, Monday, August 29, 2022. The elders told AAA “We worried if we were to confront the OLA with guns, the Oromo government officials that already hate us for being Amhara would have an excuse to get us killed.” The elders calmed the upset Amhara residents in nearby towns to Agamsa. The residents were saying “We will not sit and watch our family die. We would rather go to Agamsa and die with them.”*

Around 5 p.m. on Monday, August 29, 2022, the elders approached the OLA again and pleaded for an end to the killings and safe passage for Amhara residents to leave the town. The response they received was disappointing. In addition, they noticed the Qeeroo (radical Oromo youth) and OLA organizing in groups near Amhara residents’ homes. These were the homes of the Amhara residents that were freed earlier following the pleas of Oromo elders. Following this news, residents of nearby towns that have family in Agamsa, organized other armed Amhara farmers as well as some local policemen and headed for Agamsa on Tuesday morning, August 30, 2022. As they approached the town of Agamsa the OLA and other armed Oromo residents opened fire. The fighting persisted for about 6 hours. Several members on both sides were killed and injured. A couple of residents were killed by stray bullets. Following the armed fighting both Oromo and Amhara residents fled to nearby towns. Witnesses told AAA that the fighting persisted up to 2 p.m. The fighting died off when the armed Oromo residents that were fighting alongside the OLA fled. Most of the Amhara residents that were previously detained managed to flee the town while the whereabouts of others are still unknown.

While the realities on the ground were as such, most media and news outlets that covered the incident failed to mention the 6-hour-long exchange of fire. In addition, they cited

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false witnesses and proceeded to call Amhara farmers “Fano” and accused them of killing and looting Amhara residents.

**Shene in life and Innocent in death? The false narrative of Oromo civilians killed by so-called ‘Fano’**

Witnesses and residents of Agamsa town told the Amhara Association of America (AAA) that the reports by some media and news outlets that imply Fano forces from neighboring towns killed Oromo civilians are a deliberate attempt to invite further attacks on the residents. Some media outlets and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) have even falsely suggested Fano forces from the Amhara Region crossed the border and entered the Oromia Region to attack ethnic Oromo residents.

A 25-year-old resident of Agamsa who was detained by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) along with his wife told AAA except for 6 Oromo civilians who were killed by bullets, no single Oromo civilian was killed that day. He recounts the event as follows:

*“They spent Monday, August 29, 2022, killing, detaining, and robbing Amharas. My wife and I were among those who had their phones taken away and detained in their homes. Some of our neighbors had hidden inside the corn stacks earlier in the morning. They still had their phones on them and managed to call the nearby towns for help. Early next morning, Tuesday, August 30, 2022 residents from neighboring towns came to save us. I think they already had the information they were coming because even the Shene (OLA) that were guarding us headed for the edge of town. They also organized some armed local officials to join them. They opened fire and continued to fight for about seven hours. Eventually, Shene and their collaborators started retreating. As far as I have witnessed there were a lot of lives lost both from those who came to save us and from the Shene and their collaborators. Six civilians died from stray bullets. Two of which I know, Getachew Duguma and Aweke Jalata.*

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*The residents from the neighboring towns came into Agamsa once the enemy fled and helped those of us that were detained. They did nothing further.”*

AAA informed the survivor that the media had reported Fano controlled the town of Agamsa and was killing Oromo civilians. The survivor had the following to say:

*“This is very typical of them. Similarly, in Kiremu, July of last year on St. Michael’s day, after the killing of about 300 Amhara civilians they started saying Fano killed us. First of all, there is no such thing as Fano here. When Amhara farmers die in silence they say ‘Shene killed civilians’. When Amharas defend themselves and kill Shene they say ‘Amhara Fano killed Oromos’. Everything is just so complicated. We are farmers. We want to farm and live in peace. But we are not allowed to. When we say ‘Stop killing us’ we are told to be quiet. When we ask for the troops to be stationed to protect us, we are told they are busy with the war against the Junta [Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)] in the north. When we try to protect ourselves, they tell us ‘You are on Oromo land. Even Shene is Oromo. You cannot kill them.’ When we lost hope, we asked for safe passage to the Amhara Region. But we were prevented from even doing that.”*

A resident of Haro town who lost a relative, Melaku Shifferaw, during the Agamsa attack explained the false nature of the Fano accusations as follows:

*“I share a great-grandparent with the deceased (Melaku Shifferaw). When he called to tell us, they were surrounded by Shene, a family member of mine was among those who responded to the call. They were not, however, able to save Melaku and his family. My relative is a hard-working farmer, not a Fano. A Fano is someone who says ‘enough’ and lives in exile in the woods. To be fair the evil we go through you would flee to hell let alone the woods. The main thing here is that they are upset because we are not dying in silence.”*

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A young man in his 20s who lost his father in the Agamsa attack described the situation as follows:

*“If you’ve heard of the saying ‘A bullet screams after it kills’ it’s the same situation. Amharas are the ones massacred. The killers are OLF Shene (Oromo Liberation Front Shene/OLA), Qeeroo, and some armed Oromo residents of Agamsa. In the attack on Monday, August 29, 2022, my father was murdered by armed regional officials. Like my father, more than 50 Amhara civilians have been murdered in cold blood by Shene and Qeeroo’s. Anyone that truly seeks the truth can come see for themselves.”*

The witness added:

*“There was no government that could rescue us from the slaughter. We all called our relatives for help. On Tuesday (August 30, 2022) morning, farmers from neighboring towns fought with the OLA and their armed supporters for about 5 hours. A lot of lives were lost from our side and theirs. When they realized the farmers were here to save their families or die trying, the Shene and their supporters started retreating. The farmers then came inside the towns and took those of us that were detained and in hiding to safety. I am telling you the truth; they did not touch a single soul. In fact, the Amhara farmers came face to face with an Oromo man named Nemo Abebu who was hiding during the gunfire. They checked he was not armed and told him to go home. Saying Fano came in and killed Oromos is a total joke. First of all, there’s no such thing as Fano around here. Even if we were to say they came from the Amhara Region, the roads have been closed for quite some time. Had the government opened the roads a lot of Amharas would have already left. Who wants to live here while being killed constantly? I tell you it’s been two years since the residents of Haro have seasoned their food with salt and received*

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*any medication. We are trapped here. We can't escape and we can't move around to work. Mothers are dying during labor. Diabetics and people with high blood pressure are dying. Do you think if there was any way we could go to the Amhara Region we would stay here? I just know one day the lord will set us free from this darkness."*

AAA asked the young man if he knows any Oromo residents that lost their lives during the attack. The witness had the following to say:

*"During the fighting on Tuesday (August 30, 2022) both sides sustained heavy losses. The Oromos that died were members of the Shene (OLA) and their armed sympathizers. I guess they're only called Shene when they kill, and they are civilians when they die. If you're asking if Oromo civilians were killed, I know 6 or 7 have died from stray bullets. I know some of them like Shiferaw Gobete (around 55-years-old), Aweke Jeleta (around 65-years-old), and Getachew Deguma (around 45-years-old). Besides them all the others that were killed were Shene."*

### **Complicity of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in the ethnic-based massacres of Amharas in Oromia Region**

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) believes that the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)'s unverified reporting and general lack of thorough and organized investigations of the ethnic-based massacres of Amharas in the Oromia Region have made the institution complicit in the ethnic cleansing of Amharas.

Over the past few years, instead of investigating the frequent ethnic-based massacre of Amharas in the Oromia Region, the EHRC has only released 2 to 3-paragraph press statements on a couple of the massacres that have received media traction. Given the widespread massacres of Amhara civilians, physical injuries, kidnapping, and overall psychological



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torment, the EHRC's misreporting is disheartening. The AAA has noticed that instead of investigating the gross human rights violations against Amharas that persist in Oromia Region, the EHRC has chosen to only release press statements on some massacres that are brought to the public's attention. The statements include only partial details on the nature, extent, and organization of the attacks, the identity of the perpetrators and victims, while the roles of the state and regional government are minimized. In addition, the reports are only published in Amharic and limit the crisis from receiving international attention.

The AAA is also concerned that some of the reports by the EHRC are far from the realities on the ground and invite further danger to the already vulnerable Amhara communities. For instance, it can be recalled that AAA was concerned with the danger posed by EHRC's report released on August 18, 2022, regarding the Kiremu massacre in East Wollega Zone of Oromia Region. The EHRC does not retract statements that have been proven inaccurate nor does it take preventative measures from making the same mistakes in the future. This is evident in the report the commission released on September 6, 2022, on the Agamsa massacre in the Horo Guduru Wollega Zone of Oromia Region. The report shows gross negligence by the EHRC as it falsely vilifies an already vulnerable population.

AAA's investigation shows that more than 61 Amharas were killed by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and its collaborators in targeted identity-based attacks in Agamsa town. The EHRC's report however suggests only 3 Amharas were killed. The EHRC's report also suggested the killings were not identity-based but a result of the OLA's attempt to control a place called Abora. The fact that the EHRC's report failed to mention the widespread killings, looting, and detention of Amhara residents that happened on August 29, 2022 brings the impartiality of the investigation conducted by the commission into question. In relation to the findings of AAA's investigation, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) issued a preliminary report on September 9, 2022 stating that the OLA perpetrated an ethnic-based attack on Agamsa town beginning on Monday, August 29, 2022, which led to the mass killings and abductions, which highlights the need for the EHRC to

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reassess its investigation <sup>6</sup>. In addition to ignoring the massacre the extent to which the commission's report presented the three said victims as casualties of an armed confrontation makes it difficult to rule out as a discrepancy of sources.

The EHRC's report completely omitted the 6-hour exchange of gunfire between the OLA and Amhara farmers of neighboring towns of Agamsa trying to free hostages (Monday, August 29, 2022), and instead the EHRC falsely reported that residents of Haro Addis Kebele and armed forces from the Amhara Region launched an attack on the Oromo residents of Agamsa between August 30 and 31, 2022 killing more than 60 Oromo residents and injuring more than 70. AAA's investigation however shows there was no force present from the Amhara Region and not a single Oromo lost their life as a result of their ethnic identity. Multiple witness accounts have corroborated that both sides took heavy losses during the 6-hour-long exchange of gunfire to free the Amhara residents of Agamsa town who were held hostage. However according to AAA's investigation, no more than ten non-combatant Oromo residents of Agamsa were killed by stray bullets during the exchange.

In conclusion, the EHRC's report lacked independence/objectivity and demonstrated gross negligence. The AAA urges the commission to conduct further thorough investigation, retract its non-factual report, and issue an apology for its inaccurate reporting.

## **Conclusion**

For the past couple of years in western Oromia Region, specifically the Horo Guduru Wollega, East Wollega, West Wollega, Kelem Wollega, and West Shewa Zones, have been the grounds for widespread Amhara massacres. The ethnic cleansing of Amharas perpetrated by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) along with the collaboration of the regional government has received scarce reporting by media outlets and human rights organizations. In some cases, the rare reports have conveyed realities that are far from the truth on the ground. The Amhara Association of America (AAA) believes this has been a contribut-

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<sup>6</sup>[Ethiopian Human Rights Council \(September 9, 2022\) - Individuals' right to live in peace must be respected!](#)

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ing factor to the deteriorating human rights conditions for Amhara residents in the Oromia Region and elsewhere in Ethiopia. Particularly the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has failed at shedding light on the human rights violations that plague the western Oromia Region. In addition to hashing the cruel realities, the EHRC in some cases has participated in falsely portraying the victims of these human rights violations as the victimizers. The AAA urges the EHRC and other human rights and media organizations to take time to carefully investigate allegations of human rights violations in Oromia Region while upholding values of honesty, integrity and professionalism. More importantly, we call up on Amharas thorough out the world to set up their contribution to the efforts aimed at ending the state-sanctioned genocide against Amharas in Oromia Region and other parts of Ethiopia.

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## 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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