

As Ato Yohannes earlier stated, we have been under captivity for the past 8 months

We now have an issue we want to ask this respected court and these respected judges

Those of us presented here as defendants are hostages/captives

Does the respected court have the legal authority to make a ruling on those held hostage/captive

As hostages, we have endured physical, psychological and health problems over the past 8 months

On what basis can the court rule on hostages?

If this court allows to have a ruling on this case, it will be the first court in history to have a ruling on hostages and you will be the first judges to rule on hostage captives

This has never been done in modern judicial history

Since this will completely erode the sliver of hope that citizens had in the judicial system, we do not want to remain in captivity until Monday

If we have to stay until Monday, are we going to be held hostage until Monday? Is the court allowing our captivity to continue?

We are being forced to reach the conclusion that the court is participating in our captivity. We want an answer from the court immediately.

Second of all, the fictitious charges brought against us by the prosecutor as well as several government officials is that we have been working to impose Amhara values on Ethiopia

We are not standing here to get a ruling on Amharaness

Which Amhara values are we being charged of trying to impose? Is it his bravery? Is it his love for his country? Is it his desire to eat with others?

Which Amhara value is worthy of being charged over? Or is it that being Amhara has become a criminal offence in Ethiopia?

We have heard several government officials saying this on many occasions, but we never anticipated that we would have a court and judges appointed to put our Amhara identity on trial

This is not right, our Amhara identity is our natural identity and not an identity we can put on trial

We cannot wait on this issue until Monday, it is not right. This being broadcast on media and being presented to this court is not right. It is not within your authority to rule on someone's identity, it is our natural identity.

Identity is something that might get protection but not something that needs acknowledgment

Thirdly, there are members of the House of Peoples' Representatives among the captives ... (Judge interrupts)

[Judge] The respected Christian Tadele, first of all we have warned you multiple times secondly, this court was established based on the constitution. We have not been presented with charges that you are hostages held captive

I think you have lawyers that can explain this to you more than us...we are also humans, I am a human being as well so you should pay attention to what you are saying

There are attendants here, your family members and others. The court is not ruling on hostages held captive. This is why we have repeatedly told you that this is not a political stage.

There are charges brought to the table. The authority of Ethiopian courts is the law. We pass judgement based on the law. We determine whether the charges brought are based on the rule of law or not

Otherwise the legal objection that you have raised is something that should be presented by your lawyers. "They're hostages, we have brought captives to face charges, give us a ruling" is acceptable to us

This has to be corrected, this is why we have repeatedly stated that this is not a political stage.

First of all, whether we like it or not, whether it's correct or not, until we give a ruling, you might be guilty or not guilty, we don't know. We presume you are innocent since this is your constitutional right, it is not a right we give you.

Outside of that, you're still making this a political stage so we want you to correct this

You are not brought to the court as hostages or captives...you are not taking into consideration the opportunity we have given you to speak, I do not think you understand this right

The issues you raised is maybe something you bring up to some of the organizations that the respected Yohannes Boyalew was mentioning, that came to visit you, when asked what issues you are facing in captivity

But with us, there are clear charges brought to the table. Based on those charges, whether you have committed a crime or not will be seen in the future

Maybe your cases will be closed based on the first legal objections you bring up, or it may continue. We don't know, so please follow the standard procedure

This is not right. The reason we're continuing to listen to you is because, as the gentleman (Yohannes Boyalew) stated earlier "please give us a chance and listen to us, even us who have been arrested for 8 months are not bored/exhausted"

That is why. Is that clear? The respected Christian, you know the law, you're an elected member of the House of Peoples' Representative, you were passing legislation, you know the law very well unless you're intentionally misrepresenting it

Sometimes us Ethiopians should know what we are speaking about, earlier he (Yohannes Boyalew) was saying a lot of things. We should have interrupted him but since we had interrupted him multiple times we chose to let him speak

He was also criticizing us...please it's not an American or someone else coming to be a judge. We are present as judges, a ruling will be made based on the law. You have lawyers that can explain this to you more than us

Please, this is not a political stage. We are not holding you hostage, charges are not being brought against hostages. This is wrong, you are here as defendants and not hostages

Another thing I want you to understand is that the court can hear complaints but it does not go to jail to visit detainees

Whether the charges are correct or not is something we will see in time. There have been charges brought against you. Is it because you're Amhara like you've said? It's a matter of evidence. Is it

because you've committed a crime? It's a matter of evidence.

This is not right. You are not hostages to us. For us you are defendants. This is not right. And the respected Christian Tadele knows this

[Christian] With all due respect to the judge, I would like to be given the opportunity to speak on this issue

[Judge] Ok

[Christian] I ask not to be sanctioned from speaking in regards to this issue. We are saying that we have been hostages for the past 8 months. As hostages we are giving victim witness.

Now you're telling us that we are not hostages. Since we are saying that we were hostages. The testimony that I gave is to show that my treatment in captivity was inhumane and violated my basic human rights, and it so that the respected court can document it.

[Judge] We have no problem with documenting that. The misunderstanding is that before you arrived to this courtroom, you might have been held hostage/captive, we don't know.

But since you appeared in this courtroom last Friday and we gave you your charges. Since March 29, 2024, you are not our hostages, you are our defendants. So please don't misunderstand us

I'm not saying that you were not held hostage or that you were for the past 8 months

[Christian] The question I brought up, respected judge, is that we were hostages for the past 8 months prior to March 29th, 2024

[Judge] You can say that

[Christian] Since we were hostages, when we were brought to court after our captivity, that was the first time we saw sunlight. We were locked up in a dark room

[Judge] That's what you're supposed to say

[Christian] They brought us straight to court from our captivity. The question I asked is how will this respected court rule on someone who has been held hostage for 8 months

[Christian] As judges, I want you to use the laws Ethiopia has signed and the court rules to give a ruling. This is why I'm asking this question.

We were held hostage. We were not held like any ordinary suspects who went through normal procedures to get here.

We went from captivity straight to a hearing. I'm saying that I was held captive and I'm giving a victim testimony to the court

[Judge] Now that is a correct approach

[Christian] We want the court to take this into consideration.

Thirdly, as you stated earlier, we were elected in the 6th general election from different areas as representatives of the public.

Unless it is stated that constituents from one part of the country have less rights than constituents from another part of the country, and unless the respected court accepts this, our immunity emanates from our people's sovereignty

This immunity was lifted illegally while we were held captive illegally, endangering the constitutional order

This is not right, the implication of this is that voters of Beshasha (the constituency of the Prime Minister) have more constitutional rights than voters of Quarit (the constituency of Christian Tadele) or Wabel. Or that voters from Quarit or Wabel, Amhara voters, have less constitutional rights than other communities

This is not right, this will endanger the constitutional order. We want you to take this into consideration

Coming to common issues, when we were at Awash Arba, we heard sounds of heavy weapons being fired on a daily basis. We heard heavy to light weapons being fired daily.

Every day they took us to the jungle to use the bathroom we would find fresh burials. They would threaten us that they would kill us just like them

This created psychological and health problems for many of us. This could be counted as grave human rights violations, as you could understand

We used to face these issues on a daily basis. Beyond that we suffered from communicable diseases. As an example, I would like to state my experience.

A doctor from Black Lion Hospital, who was also a captive like us faced a similar issue. I suffered hemorrhoid, we were given not one or two but three referrals to get treated. They were not willing to bring us here to get treatment

We were suffering like our sisters during menstruation, we had to use bandages to wrap it around our rectum and suffer on a daily basis. They made us suffer like this for more than two months

We've made complaints about this multiple times, we still have our referral documentation. But they were never willing to allow us to receive medical treatment

We were dealing with constipation and they wouldn't even allow us to get treatment while we were here. Even when the doctors were trying to treat us, the security officials were saying that they would not allow us to get medical treatment unless they can see our rectum themselves.

They treated us unprofessionally, we were not able to eat any food for 72 hours and we were returned (to Awash Arba) after immense suffering. We want the respected court to understand this and document it for us

We have been exposed to multiple longterm debilitating illnesses. Even now we have not gotten proper medical treatment.

Beyond that, when we were arrested, the security officials were calling us "coward Amhara", they were saying to us, "let's see if your Amhara can save you, let's see if the Amhara people you were being a voice for like a crow will save you."

"Where were you guys for the past 30 years, and now you rise up to make demands. We will make you (Amhara) urinate on yourselves. Who are you to demand to audit the Prime Minister? Who are you to ask the Prime Minister to step down?"

A heavy and repeated beating was perpetrated on me and my family while they were saying this to us. I endured heavy beatings and couldn't walk for multiple weeks.

The respected Dr. Kassa is present here, he was the one massaging my wounds with vaseline and

providing me temporary treatment

During these heavy beatings, I also endured significant property damage. When they first came around 4 o'clock they caused major damage to my valuables and stole what they could.

For the time being I request this court to record one instance of robbery. 24 carat gold of 32.8 grams and two 10 gram (each) gold necklaces, one 6.5 gram and another 6.3 gram gold rings were stolen from me. 835 USD, and passports of mine and my family's were also stolen. They also broke my phone.

They humiliated me for my Amhara identity. Even when I asked them if I could call the speaker of the House of Peoples' Representative and inform him since I am a member of parliament and have immunity. They were beating me saying, "no one could save you let alone him."

They had a gun pointed at me in the dark demanding that I enter the password for my phone. They were beating my hand demanding that I provide my phone password.

They told me that they would kill me. They damaged the phone while beating me up. These are some of the issues I faced.

Overall, I would like to thank the respected court for listening to the human rights violations we faced individually and as a group.

I want to explain one more thing, we have endured tremendous suffering over the past 8 months. This pain and suffering is still within us. This trauma is still with us.

We need psychological counselling. We want religious figures to be allowed to visit us. We want the court to help us and request for us to get counselling treatment.

After we suffered for 8 months and went through all this trauma, and were forced to use the bathroom in burial sites. After we were threatened to be killed on those burial sites, providing in writing what we endured will not be enough to express our feelings.

We are in trauma. This has to be understood through a health professional's perspective. We are in a state of trauma. We want the court to understand that we might get some sort of mental relief by expressing what we endured.

Even if there is nothing else the court can do, we are telling you our experiences here because we believe there is a court here that can listen to us.

It is out of respect that we are speaking at this hearing, since it is a court that is granted power through the constitution.

Even if the court can't do much for us, we expected that it would not deprive us of our right to be heard. I ask the court again to listen to us with patience. I would like to thank the court again for giving me the chance to speak.