



Report on injury of Amhara detainees due to harsh weather, deprivation and mistreatment in Awash Arba detention facility

Updated February 23, 2024

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) has received credible information from various sources that 29 detainees including 21 political figures and journalists arrested in connection with the ongoing war on Amhara Region sustained physical injuries ranging from moderate to serious in severity following a storm that took place on February 15, 2024, beginning at 6:00 pm in Awash Arba detention facility. The Awash Arba camp is located in the Afar Region of Ethiopia approximately 240-km from Addis Ababa city. It has been called Ethiopia's Guantanamo due to its extreme and harsh weather and conditions and it has been used as a concentration camp for high-profile Amhara dissidents including opposition figures and journalists who spoke out against or reported on human rights violations targeting the Amhara people including genocidal massacres (in which state actors are implicated) and the ongoing war declared on the Amhara people. The storm on February 15th contained a combination of heavy winds, sand and rain which caused injury to the detainees who were not provided shelter. All

detainees faced various levels of physical injury but the injury to journalist Tewodros Zerfu, a journalist at Yegna TV is life threatening. The remaining five detainees were however seriously injured including political figure and media owner Sintayehu Chekol, journalist Belay Manaye, political figure and digital blogger Zerihun Gessesse, attorney Addisu Getaneh, and a civilian from Bahir Dar named Eskinder (last name unknown). Six of the seriously injured detainees including Tewodros were taken to Awash Sebat Hospital for treatment while the remaining detainees remained in the camp and were not provided medical treatment. Sources said Belay Manaye, Zerihun Gessesse, Sintayehu Chekol, and Eskindir were referred to Addis Ababa for further medication but they were denied by authorities. The camp facilities were completely destroyed and the detainees are still being held there without shelter and basic utilities while facing harsh temperatures of up to 44 degrees Celsius. Multiple sources including a former detainee and family members of the detained victims have also testified about the harsh treatment of and egregious human rights violations against the detainees.

A former detainee arrested in August 2023 and released four months later described the bad conditions they experienced in Awash Arba camp saying: *“it is like experiencing death while alive, at times it feels as though actually dying would be better”*. According to this source, no one including family members or lawyers are permitted to visit the detainees; family members are only allowed to send essential items through the Federal Police Investigation Bureau located in Mexico Square in Addis Ababa city. The detainees are permitted supervised personal calls (under police surveillance) to family members once every 2-3 weeks. Almost all the detainees’ due procedural rights have been violated including court oversight of their case, the right to speak to their lawyer and to be told the reason for their arrest. They were simply told they were arrested in relation to *“current issues”*. He describes the unbearable conditions of the camp including extreme temperatures of up to 44 degrees Celsius, and discomfort associated with the narrow tin

enclosures (tin retracted heat). They are unable to wear clothing and sleep comfortably due to the extreme weather. They took turns napping and fanning one another in order to tolerate the extreme heat. Another cause of concern was wild animals (including snakes, rats and frogs) scavenging the area which is worsened by a nearby grave site where executed/killed soldiers are placed. Detainees were deprived of sufficient food. The source expresses “*It left us on the brink of life and death.*” They received only two small pieces of bread per day, nothing else.

AAA has interviewed relatives of several of the detainees which corroborated the information above. One source told AAA that one of the detainees was arrested by federal police officers in December 2023 in Addis Ababa city and that he was taken to the camp three days after the arrest, but she only discovered his whereabouts after eight days. According to this source, at the time of the arrest, they confiscated private property including books and two smart phone devices. She said security forces did not disclose the reason for his arrest and simply said the offense was related to “*current issues*”. She added she has not been able to visit him in person so she has been forced to send him essential items via Federal Police and she would speak to him over the phone once every 2-3 weeks since his arrest. She added that he is not permitted to speak freely as he is under constant surveillance. She confirmed he was able to relay to her that he had sustained moderate injuries as a result of the storm. AAA also spoke with other relatives of detainees who were arrested in November 2023 and September 2023. This source confirmed cases of injuries suffered in the storm and that he received medical treatment due to serious injuries he suffered in the storm.

AAA has learned that family members and spouses of detainees are facing economic hardship as a result of losing the stream of income from their detained spouses. In one case, the 10-year-old daughter of one of the detainees has developed hypertension as a

result of seeing her father repeatedly arrested and that her condition was recently aggravated after he was rearrested. The young girl is currently receiving medical treatment for her condition however her condition only improves when she hears her father's voice, which is rare for her.



Figure 1: Political figures and journalists who face mistreatment while in detainment in the Awash Arba detention facility and suffered physical injury due to a storm that took place on February 15, 2024.

Below is a list of 18 identified Amhara detainees including journalists, political figures and police officers arrested in connection with the ongoing war on Amhara Region facing mistreatment in Awash Arba detention facility and physical injury due to the storm occurred on February 15, 2024.

No.	Detainee Name	Occupation	Affiliation	Address	Severity of Injury
1	Zerihun Gessesse	Politician	NaMA Party	Kombolcha	Moderate
2	Belay Manaye	Journalist	Ethio-News	Addis Ababa	Serious
3	Tewodros Hailemariam	Politician	NaMA Party	Addis Ababa	Moderate

4	Sintayehu Chekol	Media Owner and Politician	Tsinat Media, Balderas Party	Addis Ababa	Serious
5	Addisu Getaneh	Human Rights Attorney		Addis Ababa	Serious
6	Abebe (last name unknown)	Officer	Federal Police	Addis Ababa	Moderate
7	Assaye (last name unknown)	Officer	Addis Ababa Police	Addis Ababa	Moderate
8	Degu Tesfaye			Addis Ababa	Moderate
9	Jan Kebede	Officer	Addis Ababa Police	Addis Ababa	Moderate
10	Eskinder (last name unknown)			Bahir Dar	Serious
11	Abinet Tamirat	Journalist	Zehabesha	Addis Ababa	Moderate
12	Tewodros Zerfu	Journalist	Yegna-TV	Addis Ababa	Critical
13	Tewodros Asres			Bahir Dar	Moderate
14	Abay Zewdu	Journalist	Amhara Media Center	Addis Ababa	Moderate
15	Derbew Nigussie	Politician	Enat Party	Woldia	Moderate
16	Manaye (last name unknown)			Woldia	Moderate
17	Abera (last name unknown)			Woldia	Moderate
18	Birhanu (last name unknown)			Woldia	Moderate

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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