



Sexual violence and illegal arrests by Oromo Prosperity Party regime forces in Debre Markos University

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Overview

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) has verified that on June 16th, 2024, Oromo Prosperity Party regime soldiers (regime soldiers) forcibly entered a female dormitory in Debre Markos University leading to the death of one student, the rape of more than 15 students, and theft of their property in Debre Markos city of East Gojjam Zone (Amhara Region, Ethiopia). AAA has also been able to confirm that on June 19th, 2024 three students were illegally arrested following the incident by regime forces in collusion with university administrators.

Details of the Incident

On June 16th, 2024 credible reports confirmed a brutal attack targeting the female dormitory at Debre Markos University, located in Debre Markos city in East Gojjam Zone

of Amhara Region, Ethiopia.¹ AAA conducted a human rights investigation into the reported attack on the university's main campus. According to AAA's investigation, regime soldiers perpetrated this incident, resulting in the abduction of five students and the subsequent death of one student, the rape of more than 15 female students, and the theft of numerous belongings of the female students. AAA also verified that regime forces, along with Debre Markos University administrators, illegally detained three students in connection with this incident.

According to sources, on the night of the incident (June 16th, 2024), at around 11:00 p.m., dozens of individuals wearing *Ethiopian National Defense Force* (ENDF) uniforms stormed into the women's dormitory buildings, specifically targeting Blocks 3, 9, and 16. The perpetrators then forcibly entered the rooms and subsequently committed acts of rape, robbery, and physical assault. Additionally, at least five female students were abducted; one reportedly died, while the remaining four returned to campus after two to three days. Although the exact number of rape victims is unknown, reliable sources indicate that more than 15 women were raped.

As the initial aftermath of such an attack created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty among the students, it could have caused many victims to remain silent. Therefore, the actual number of raped individuals is likely greater than reported. AAA has received reliable information that the death of the female student was caused by repeated gang rape by the soldiers. It has been reported that the body of the deceased female student was immediately taken to an unknown location. In addition to these atrocities, laptops, mobile phones, and other personal belongings were looted by the perpetrators, with 17 verified mobile phones reported stolen.

¹ See war updates weekly [report](#) for the week of June 17th to 23rd, 2024

Aftermath of the incident and illegal arrests

Following the incident, the university administration, along with security officials, heavily guarded the affected buildings, and military personnel threatened students to prevent them from disclosing information in an attempt to cover up the event. Shortly after the attack, various social media platforms shared information about the incident, exposing the regime's brutality. However, on June 18th, 2024, the university released a statement denying the incident entirely.² Despite it being exam season, a significant number of female students skipped their exams and fled the campus in panic.

Efforts by the university administration to cover up the incident have hindered the identification of the victims. Students involved in various organizations within the university expressed their objections on various occasions, demanding that the incident and the victims should not be hidden or denied, at least for the sake of the victims' families. In response, the university administration handed over three students to the regime command post, leading to their arrest on June 19th, 2024. Despite a court decision to release them on bail, these three students remain illegally detained at the time of producing this report and are suffering as a result. Additionally, their arrests caused them to miss their final and exit examinations.

AAA has identified the names of three unlawfully detained students as follows.

- *Yeshabel Zerihun* is a mechanical engineering student who missed his exit exam and graduation this year due to his arrest. He is a member of the university's student union and is from Meshenti near Bahir-Dar city.
- *Haile-Mariam Fente* is a law student and member of the university's anti-corruption club originally from Sekela Woreda in West Gojjam Zone. He missed his final exam

²See [statement](#) issued on June 18, 2024 on the Facebook page of Debre Markos University.

due to his arrest.

- *Yosef Getachew* is an economics student and member of the university's peace forum originally from North Shewa Zone. He also missed his final exam due to his arrest.



(a) Yeshabel Zerihun



(b) Haile-Mariam Fente



(c) Yosef Getachew

Figure 1: Photographs of students who were unlawfully detained in Debre Markos University on June 19th, 2024.

About the Amhara Association of America (AAA)

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) is a non-profit civic organization based in Charlotte, North Carolina that investigates and documents human rights violations in the context of conflict, violence and political repression in Ethiopia. AAA seeks to inform U.S. policymakers, international human rights organizations, journalists, researchers, 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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