



Investigative Report into the Killings and Physical Injuries of Civilians by the Oromo ENDF in Merawi Town (North Mecha Woreda, West Gojjam Zone, Amhara Region) on April 10, 2023

Executive Summary

As of Sunday, April 9, 2023, the Oromo *Ethiopian National Defense Force* (ENDF) were largely present in Merawi town of North Mecha Woreda (West Gojjam Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia). A number of ENDF infantry convoys also arrived in Merawi on April 10, 2023, reportedly to pursue members of the Amhara Special Forces (ASF) in nearby areas as youth were preparing to continue protest that had started the day before, according to witnesses. As the situation became more tense, the town's elders swiftly convened and counseled the ENDF officials to abandon their purpose of pursuing the members and let the youths' voices be heard. When the ENDF infantry persisted in carrying out its objective to pursue the ASF in the area and disperse the gatherers, the negotiation ended up coming to an impasse. Then the residents of the town assembled to protest, and the ENDF started shooting at them, killing and injuring unarmed protestors and anyone else who happened to be on the streets. The Amhara Association of America (AAA) was able to verify the deaths of three civilians and the physical injuries of another 21 individuals by name.

Introduction

Since early April 2023, the Prosperity Party regime led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali has been trying to disarm the regional special forces in Ethiopia. Though it was announced that the measure targets all regional special forces in the country, practically, it has selectively targeted the ASF and Fano (non-state volunteer militias).

This measure by the Abiy administration that selectively targets the ASF and Fano was met with stiff resistance across all corners of Amhara Region in Ethiopia. As of April 9, 2023, there were peaceful demonstrations in several cities and towns of the Amhara Region, including Gonder, Debre Tabor, Dessie, Kombolcha, Debre Birhan, Bahir Dar, Merawi, Injibara, Burie, Finote Selam, Debre Markos, and Dejen. Political parties and members of the Federal Parliament have also expressed their objections against this decision of the federal government. Protests also decried other pertinent issues facing the Amhara people including ongoing apartheid practices and ethnic-based massacres, displacement, political marginalization, home demolitions and travel restrictions in the Oromia Region and elsewhere in Ethiopia.

The ruling party's unilateral decision to dissolve and disarm the ASF is legally and practically unacceptable. Legally, according to the 1994 *Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* (FDRE) Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, under Article 52(2)g, it empowers regional states with the power to "establish and administer a state police force." The Constitution does not say the power of the regional governments is limited to the power to establish regular forces only. Instead, it allows states to establish security forces under any name, whether special or regular. The "special" or "regular" terms are a matter of terminology and uniform; whether they are "special" or regular," they are still state police and thus fall within the ambit of the state's power under Article 52(2)g of the Constitution. This was what states were practically doing before the pronouncement of

this decision. For instance, in the context of the Amhara National Regional State, the ASF is administered within the police commission of the region, and the recruitment, promotion, and privileges of members of the special force are similar to those of the regular police forces. The only difference, if it can be taken for real, is that the members of the special force are dressed differently and the regular police in the region are dressed with their own distinct blue uniforms.

The second clause under the aforementioned article of the Constitution strengthens this assertion. The clause grants states the power "*to maintain public order and peace within the state.*" This implies that if situations in a particular state necessitate the establishment of specially trained and armed forces, states can establish their own special force with a view to maintaining peace and security within their territory. In this context, the establishment and necessity of ASF in the Amhara Region are justified. The Amhara Region is uniquely exposed to security challenges in the country. There are challenges within the region from the terrorist *Oromo Liberation Army* (OLA), which widely operates in the Oromo Special Zone of the region and is responsible for the death and displacement of thousands of Amharas within the neighboring zones of the region. For instance, the OLA has destroyed the town of Ataye (the administrative seat of Efratana Gidim Woreda) eleven times so far. There are also formidable challenges from groups affiliated to the *Tigray People's Liberation Front* (TPLF) including the Kimant militia, which widely moves in the West Gonder Zone and are responsible for the abduction of several civilians in the zone, and the Agew Shengo militias operating in the north. So the existence of these security challenges justifies the need to have a specially trained force that can maintain peace and order in the region pursuant to the second clause of Article 52(2)g of the Constitution.

The decision of the Abiy administration is wrong not only legally but also practically. The

TPLF, which invaded the Amhara Region in four rounds following the withdrawal of federal forces from Mekelle, capital of the Tigray Region, in June 2021, is preparing for another round of invasion and openly declaring that it will retake the Amhara territories of Raya and Welkait. The security challenge within the Amhara Region from the OLA is also unabated in the region; it, for instance, opened a war against the residents of Ataye on April 1st, 2023. Given the situation of the Amhara Region, the dissolution of the ASF would undoubtedly put the region at risk from clear and present threats. Therefore, the decision of the Prosperity Party is untimely in the Amhara Region.

To enforce this decision, the administration deployed the ENDF in various places in the Amhara Region. AAA believes that the large deployment of the ENDF in the Amhara Region is unconstitutional for the following reasons: For one thing, the ENDF is principally mandated to defend the external sovereignty of the state and will only be deployed within the territory of a regional state if power is entrusted to it in an emergency decree in times of extra-ordinary exigencies, the House of Federation decides that Federal Government intervention is necessary or the regional governments themselves decide that a situation is beyond their control and that deployment of the national armed force within states is needed. However, either of these grounds is absent in the situation in the Amhara Region. For this reason, we cast doubt on the non-partisan stance of the ENDF at least as far as the activities it is doing under the Amhara Region are concerned.

To make matters worse, in some places in the region, the ENDF was seen participating in activities that primarily limit the rights of every individual to assemble and make a demonstration, which has constitutional protection under Article 30 of the Constitution. And in some other areas, it was using lethal force to disperse demonstrations and committing unlawful killings and physical injuries against the demonstrators. For instance, the AAA verified on the ground that in Merawi town (the administrative seat of

North Mecha Woreda, West Gojjam Zone); ENDF killed at least three men and injured twenty-one individuals. AAA investigators visited Merawi town and interviewed victims, victims' families and health professionals from Merawi Primary Hospital and Merawi Health Center.

Following peaceful demonstrations held in Merawi town, members of the ENDF opened fire on the gatherers, which killed three and physically injured twenty one in the town

The town of Merawi is known for its vibrant youth who publicly object to repressive administrations toward the Amhara. Joining other cities and towns of the Amhara Region, the youth in Merawi gathered to say "no" to the decision of the Prosperity Party for the disarmament and dissolution of the ASF as of Sunday, April 9th, 2023. The demonstration was an event that was attended by a significant number of residents of the town. It was most importantly peaceful in that the demonstrators were all unarmed and there were no attempts to destroy public or private properties in the town. There was no propaganda that called for war, nor were there any expressions that injured the dignity of others. An individual who attended the two days of demonstration in the city told AAA, *"The demonstration was attended by a large number of residents in the town and was peaceful. We only expressed our opinion that the government's decision to target the ASF and Fano is prejudicial to the Amharas in the nation given the threat we have."*

Like in other cities and towns in the Amhara region, the ENDF soldiers were largely present in Merawi town as of Sunday, April 9, 2023. According to witnesses, on the next day, several convoys of ENDF infantry soldiers arrived in Merawi as youth organized to continue the protest that had begun the previous day. As tensions mounted, the elders of the town quickly gathered and advised the ENDF officials to quit their mission of chasing the members of ASF. Then the negotiation ended in disagreement when the ENDF

infantry insisting on its mission to chase the ASF in the area and disperse the gatherers. Finally, it opened fire on the residents of the town who had been gathered to protest, killing and injuring not only protesters but also anyone who was found on the streets. AAA was able to verify the killings of 3 individuals and the physical injuries of 21 others, who are identified in the list of names provided below:

No.	Victim Name	Sex	Age	Kebele	Phone Number	Outcome	Remark
1	Elias Desalegn	M	40	Enashenifalen		Death	
2	Abate Mesfin Yimam	M	45	2		Death	
3	Amlakie Endeshaw	M	11	Enamirt		Bowel perforation (later died in hospital)	Felege Hiwot Hospital
4	Getahun Yenehod Fentie	M	28	Midregenet	918024413	Bullet injury on leg	Referred to Tibebe Gihon Hospital
5	Getachew Andualem Acheneff	M	17	Dagi	978532782	Bullet injury on leg	Referred to Tibebe Gihon Hospital
6	Girma Zeleke Worku	M	48	3		Bullet injury	
7	Kassahun Enyew Worku	M	15	Enguti		Abdominal bullet injury	
8	Mandefro Muche Hunegnaw	M	24	Bachima		Left cheek bullet injury	Referred to Tibebe Gihon Hospital
9	Tamir Terefe Sewunet	M	28	Libaba		Left hand Fracture	Referred to Felege Hiwot Hospital
10	Dessie Adino	M	25			Left heap bullet injury	Referred to Felege Hiwot Hospital
11	Walelign Atanaw	M	28	3		Right neck bullet injury	Referred to Felege Hiwot Hospital
12	Mengistu Yirde Tazeb	M	18	Bachima		Bullet injury	
13	Yebelay Adamu Alelign	M	25	Bachima		Left tie and nose bullet injury	Referred to Tibebe Gihon Hospital
14	Mamyie Adie Ayenew	F	16	Bachima		Left lung bullet injury	Referred to Tibebe Gihon Hospital
15	Yigrem Yihunie Gerie	M	30	2		Bullet injury (leg fracture)	Felege Hiwot Hospital
16	Samuel Assefa Kassie	M	16	2	918710026	Left cheek bullet injury	Felege Hiwot Hospital
17	Birhanu Aynetesfa Getie	M	26	Ambo Mesk		Bullet injury lower leg	Felege Hiwot Hospital
18	Temesgen Tefera	M	18	Dangila		Leg Bullet Injury	
19	Enkuane Atanaw Yismaw	M		3		Bullet Injury	
20	Zemene Chanie Birlie	M	55	1		Leg Bullet Injury	
21	Alemu Metalign	M		Gora Got		Serious bleeding	
22	Tsedalu Hulgize Temesgen	M	30	2		Bullet Injury	
23	Liyeh Asemma Abitew	M	45	Bachima		Bullet Injury	
24	Emuyie Dessie	M	15	Bachima			

The attack was indiscriminate

A lawful forceful measure shall not be conducted randomly. Careful judgment has to be taken to avoid targeting children or those who have no involvement in activities that violate the law. The ENDF opened fire around 10:00 a.m. on April 10, 2023, in Merawi

town against, according to witnesses, anyone who was found on the streets and in homes locked inside, including the children. AAA verified that among those who suffered physical injuries, four were children who had not reached 18 years of age. And one child, 11-year-old Amlakie Endeshaw, who was not a participant in the protest but was on the street that day, was struck by a bullet in his abdomen, which led to his bowel being perforated; he later died at Felege Hiwot Hospital, where he was referred from Merawi Primary Hospital. The measure also targeted students of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church (Yekolo Temari), such as Tamir Terefe and Temesgen Tefera, whom no one suspects would participate in any demonstration activities.



Figure 1: Picture of the late Amlakie Endeshaw

The measure was also arbitrary in that residents of the town who were locked inside their homes were targeted. For instance, Abate Mesfin, in 02 Kebele, was killed by the ENDF soldiers while he was in his home with his family members, according to his older brother, whom AAA interviewed, after his home was struck by repeated braille (a type of machine gun) gunfire.

There were also premeditated attacks

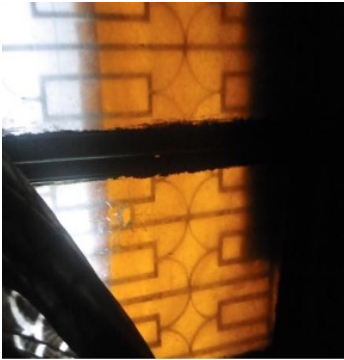
AAA verified that premeditated attacks were committed against the residents of Merawi town following the demonstrations held on the 9th and 10th of April, 2023. The killing of Abate Mesfin, a father of five children, whose youngest child is eight days old, in kebele 02 of the town is evidence.



Figure 2: Picture of the late Abate Mesfin

AAA investigators interviewed the older brother of the late Abate, Abebe Mesfin, on April 13, 2023, and verified from other sources as well that the killing of Abate was planned. Primarily, Abate did not participate in the demonstrations held in the town, and he instead remained in his home with his family. However, his home was raided with repeated gunshots, and there were no similar incidents in the town. And also, the shots are below waist level to target anyone found inside the home, and the weapon used (machine gun) is another evidence of the premeditated nature of the attack. A witness told AAA the

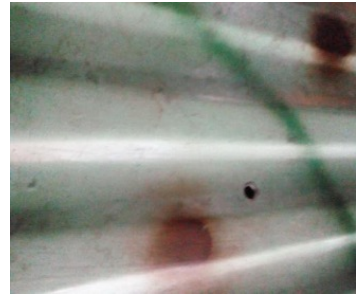
weapon used was a braille. Moreover, Abebe added that *”those who were firing to Abate’s homes were non-Amharic speaking soldiers.”*



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 3: Pictures showing how the late Abate Mesfin’s home was raided.

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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