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# 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2022, the government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front signed a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, ending active hostilities between them, which held throughout the year, although reports of abuses by Eritrean troops along the border and by militia groups persisted. In March the U.S. Secretary of State "determined that members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) forces, and Amhara forces committed war crimes – during the conflict in northern Ethiopia. Members of the ENDF, EDF, and Amhara forces also committed crimes against humanity, including murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and persecution. Members of the Amhara forces also committed the crime against humanity of deportation or forcible transfer and committed ethnic cleansing in western Tigray." In April the government disbanded regional special forces nationwide. The Amhara and Oromia regions experienced conflict between government forces and Fano militia and the Oromo Liberation Army, respectively. In August the government declared a state of emergency, under which there were widespread reports of violations by the government, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious abuses in a conflict, including reportedly unlawful or widespread civilian deaths or harm, enforced disappearances or abductions, forcible transfers of civilian populations, torture, physical abuses, conflict-related sexual violence or punishment; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests of journalists, censorship, and the existence of criminal libel and slander laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including rape and sexual violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of racial or ethnic minority groups; and laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, which were enforced.

The government took limited steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses. The government prosecuted some lower-level officers for abuses.

There were reports of widespread killings of civilians, mass forced displacement and ethnic cleansing, rape, and other forms of gender-based violence, looting, and destruction of property by Amhara militias and affiliated groups in western Tigray. There were also reports of widespread unlawful killings of civilians and government officials in Amhara and Oromia regions and elsewhere, including by the Oromo Liberation Army. Local militia groups in Afar, Oromia, and Somali regions reportedly carried out attacks and killings of civilians, displacing thousands.

### Section 1.

#### Respect for the Integrity of the Person

## **A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS**

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), and the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) reported numerous cases of unlawful or extrajudicial killings within the context of conflicts in Amhara and Oromia regions and other parts of the country, including Tigray.

There were numerous instances when regional police forces reportedly used excessive lethal force on civil demonstrators. According to the EHRC, on February 17, security forces killed at least three and injured 30 others following the demonstrators' demands to restore water services to the town of Welkite in Central Ethiopia Region after more than a month of water disruption. On June 2, the government's Security and Intelligence Task Force acknowledged security forces killed at least three civilians in Addis Ababa during a protest on the demolition of mosques by the Oromia regional government. On July 20, media reported government security forces killed one and injured 16 protesters in Somali Region's Birqod district following a disagreement with the local government on the use of a water borehole.

The Federal Police Internal Investigative Bureau conducted limited investigation of criminal acts perpetrated by police. The internal unit's decisions regarding penalties against police were confidential.

The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) had a military investigative unit that reported to the military attorney general's office. Military police passed evidence from their investigations to prosecutors and defense counsels. The ENDF attorney general directed the investigations and heard the cases in military court. On April 25, the House of People's Representative amended the defense proclamation, giving the military court jurisdiction to hear cases including crimes of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

There were numerous reports of killings by militia groups in the context of conflict-related abuse.

## **B. DISAPPEARANCE**

There were reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

During the year, local media reports alleged an increase in enforced disappearances of prominent figures critical of the government, including political commentators, former military officers, investigative journalists, and social media activists. On June 5, the EHRC called on the government to disclose the whereabouts of arrested individuals and to bring their cases to court with credible evidence after the government increased arrests of journalists and activists.

On July 12, the EHRC released the *Ethiopia Annual Human Rights Situation Report (June 2022 – June 2023)* highlighting cases of enforced disappearances where members of the Federal Police, regional security forces, and the ENDF detained individuals from the streets, work, and home and kept them in incommunicado detention at unidentified locations. The EHRC stated the now-defunct Somali Special Force called one of its former members to report to his office in December 2022, and the person was reportedly missing since.

There were also numerous reports of enforced disappearance by both security forces and armed militia groups in relation to conflicts in Amhara and Oromia regions and elsewhere. Truck drivers working on the Addis-Djibouti highway, A1 Road, connecting Ethiopia to Djibouti port,

complained the government was not addressing their security concerns, and armed men continued to kidnap and kill drivers. According to several reports, thousands of ethnic Tigrayans remained detained throughout the year in unknown locations in western Tigray and elsewhere. On August 23, local human rights group Human Rights First alleged to news network VOA Amharic at least 3,000 Tigrayan members of the ENDF were in detention in unknown places despite hope for their release as stipulated by the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA). The VOA spoke with family members of former military officers who said they still did not know the whereabouts of their relatives, although they had received information regarding their detention from those recently released from the same prisons.

## **C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES**

Although the constitution prohibited such practices, there were reports security officials tortured and otherwise abused detainees.

According to the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), HRW, Amnesty International, and numerous media reports, the government engaged in torture in its security operations and failed to hold soldiers accused of torture accountable.

In a March report to the UN Committee against Torture, OMCT, EHRCO, and Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia reported the government had used torture, excessive force, and other forms of inhuman treatment in conflict regions despite democratic reforms enacted in 2018. During the year, EHRC investigations into prison and detention centers in Amhara, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Somali regions revealed detainees reported police beat them during arrests and in detention. The EHRC's monitoring teams found evidence of injuries on some detainees who reported police beatings. In addition, the EHRC stated Oromia police tortured suspects held in unofficial detention centers, including in Oromia police training camps and government offices. Individuals were allegedly beaten and tortured as punishment for supporting armed groups and to extract information. The EHRC's annual report stated regional police officers across various districts of Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Somali regions beat prisoners and detainees for various reasons, including to extract confessions.

On June 5, the EHRC reported it was investigating an allegation government security forces tortured individuals in a police training center in Gelan town of Oromia. According to the EHRC, security forces took the victims from their homes in Addis Ababa to the police training camp starting May 2, after unrest broke out in Amhara Region following the federal government's initiative to dissolve regional Special Forces.

On June 1, HRW alleged Amhara security forces, militias, and officials in western Tigray tortured, mistreated, and subjected Tigrayan detainees to inhuman treatment, including beatings with iron pipes, electric wires, and sticks. HRW reported detainees described being tied in stress positions for long periods, either at night or in the hot sun in Badu Sidiste, a prison that also served as a camp for Amhara Special Forces.

On May 12, the UN Committee against Torture expressed grave concern regarding complaints of torture and mistreatment by police officers, prison guards, and other military and security force members in police stations, detention centers, federal prisons, military bases, and unofficial or secret detention places. The committee urged the government to allow an independent body to investigate all human right violations, including allegations of torture.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison conditions were harsh and life-threatening due to gross overcrowding, food shortages, physical abuse, and inadequate sanitary conditions.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** Gross overcrowding was common, and prisoners often lacked access to quality food, potable water, sanitation, heating, ventilation, lighting, or medical care. Authorities sometimes kept prisoners confined in cells for long periods without an opportunity for movement, exercise, or use of showers or sanitary facilities. Conditions in detention camps were reportedly life threatening.

There were multiple media reports security forces, including members of the ENDF, took prisoners out of detention centers and committed extrajudicial killings.

The law prohibited detention in any facility other than an official detention center; however, the ENDF, regional police, police, local militias, and other formal and informal law enforcement entities reportedly operated an unknown number of unofficial detention centers. During the year, several reports implicated the government in increased use of informal detention centers to keep detainees.

**Administration:** Authorities failed to conduct investigations of credible reports of mistreatment.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government permitted monitoring of prisons and detention centers by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and, on some occasions, the EHRC. Following the imposition of a state of emergency on August 4, such access was largely curtailed and granted only on a case-by-case basis. The ICRC and international human rights monitors were reportedly denied access to alleged detention facilities in western Tigray, where many thousands of ethnic Tigrayans reportedly were detained in life-threatening conditions.

## **D. ARBITRARY ARREST OR DETENTION**

The constitution and federal law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally did not observe these requirements, especially regarding the mass detentions made under the state of emergency declared on August 4.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The constitution and law required judicial authorization for an arrest and required detainees to appear in court and face charges within 48 hours of arrest or as soon thereafter as local circumstances and communications permit. Travel time to the court was not included in this 48-hour period. With a warrant, authorities could detain persons suspected of serious offenses for 14 days without charge. The courts increasingly pushed authorities to present evidence or provide clear justifications within 14 days or release the detainee. Courts also demanded to see police investigative files to assess police requests for additional time.

A functioning bail system was in place. Bail was not available, however, for persons charged with murder, treason, or corruption. In other cases, the courts set bail at amounts few citizens could afford. Police reportedly failed to release detainees after a court decided to release them on bail; sometimes, police filed another charge immediately after the court's decision, filed repeated bail appeals, or transferred detainees to regional jurisdictions to face another charge. The government provided public defenders for detainees unable to afford private legal counsel, but defendants received these services only when their cases went to trial and not during the pretrial phases. In some cases, a single defense counsel represented multiple defendants in a single case. Some suspects were held incommunicado.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** There were reports of widespread arbitrary or unlawful detention. The government reportedly detained thousands of ethnic Amhara and Oromo after the August 4 State of Emergency, converting warehouses, schools, youth centers, private residences, and other makeshift facilities to house the growing detainee population, according to media reports.

On February 15, the EHRC reported police in Addis Ababa and Oromia arbitrarily detained journalists and numerous members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) after authorities canceled a protest called by two opposing groups within the EOTC. News network BBC reported government security forces on February 4 used excessive force against followers of the main church, resulting in extrajudicial killings, beatings, harassment, and arbitrary arrests. In investigations in Oromia, Amhara, and Addis Ababa, the EHRC found many detainees had been arrested without court orders or formal investigations, and many had not been brought before court within the time the law prescribed. In addition, the EHRC reported many police stations held suspects whose charges were dropped or who should have been released in accordance with court orders. In some cases, children reportedly were held in detention on suspicion of involvement in criminal activity, contrary to the law requiring their release on unconditional bail.

On June 1, the EHRC reported security forces in Addis Ababa arrested several Islamic community members around Anwar Mosque for peacefully demonstrating against the demolition of at least 19 mosques deemed “illegal” by the Oromia regional government in Sheger City. Media reported Addis Ababa police cracked down on a May 27 protest within the premises and the surrounding area of the mosque, resulting in two killed and more than 40 injured, and many more arbitrarily detained.

There were reports Amharan militia arbitrarily detained thousands of Tigrayans in western Tigray.

**Pretrial Detention:** The proportion of the inmate population in pretrial detention and average length of time held were not available. Lengthy legal procedures, large numbers of detainees, judicial inefficiency, and staffing shortages contributed to frequent trial delays, in some cases lasting years.

## **E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL**

The law provided for an independent judiciary, but the government did not always respect judicial independence and impartiality. Although civil courts largely operated with independence, criminal courts were weak and overburdened. Media and human right groups reported police repeatedly denied fair public trial, including through harassment and detention of defense lawyers.

### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally did not enforce this right.

The federal Public Defender’s Office provided legal counsel to indigent defendants, but the scope and quality of service reportedly were inadequate due to attorney shortages. A public defender often handled more than 100 cases and might represent multiple defendants in the same criminal case. Numerous free legal-aid clinics, primarily based at universities, also provided legal services. In certain areas of the country, the law allowed volunteers such as law students and professors to represent clients in court on a pro bono basis. There reportedly was a lack of a strong and inclusive local bar association or other standardized criminal defense representation.

The constitution recognized both religious and traditional courts. Many rural citizens had little access to formal judicial systems and relied on traditional mechanisms for resolving conflict. By law, all parties to a dispute had to agree to use a traditional or religious court before such a court could hear a case, and either party could appeal to a regular court at any time. Sharia (Islamic law) courts could hear religious and family cases involving Muslims if both parties agreed before the start of the formal legal process to use the sharia court. Sharia courts received some funding from the government. Sharia courts adjudicated most cases in Somali and Afar regions, which were predominantly Muslim. Other traditional systems of justice, such as councils of elders, functioned predominantly in rural areas. Women often believed they lacked access to fair hearings in the

traditional court system because local custom excluded them from participation in councils of elders and there was persistent gender discrimination.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

On July 24, HRW called for immediate release of seven Oromo opposition figures arbitrarily detained for three years due to the government's repeated violation of due process and court orders. HRW stated the government kept Abdi Regassa, Dawit Abdeta, Lammi Begna, Michael Boran, Kenessa Ayana, Gaada Oljira, and Gaada Gebissa in a prolonged and unlawful detention despite several judicial orders directing their release. HRW stated authorities of the Oromia police repeatedly violated the detainees' due process rights, forcibly disappearing them or holding them incommunicado, denying them access to their lawyers and family members for weeks or months – at times up to eight months – and frequently moving them between makeshift and official detention sites, further hampering their families' and lawyers' access.

In August media reported the arrest of political figures and elected officials including Christian Tadele, a prominent lawmaker from the National Movement of Amhara opposition party and an outspoken government critic in connection with the conflict in Amhara. The EHRC on September 1 stated it had visited 53 detainees kept in a military camp in Awash Arba, Afar Region, including Tadele, and lawmakers Yohannes Buayalew (a member of Amhara Regional Council) and Kassa Teshager (a member of the Addis Ababa City Council) who were both arrested in their constituencies and transferred to Afar Region. During the visit, detainees told the EHRC they experienced ethnic slurs and harassment during their transfer to Awash Arba. The Federal Police justified transferring detainees to the military camp due to overcrowding in the Federal Police detention center in Addis Ababa. Detainees said their families did not know their whereabouts, and the detention center was built in an extremely hot area and lacked basic services.

### **F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION**

There were some reports the government sought to intimidate critics outside its borders. In one instance, a journalist faced potential forcible repatriation from Saudi Arabia. In some cases, diaspora journalists reported their families remaining in Ethiopia had received threats.

### **G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION**

On May 31, the EHRCO released the findings of its investigation into a government-sponsored house demolition and forced eviction mainly in Oromia Region, in areas surrounding the capital Addis Ababa, to make way for a newly established Sheger City administration. The local independent human rights group stated actions of the Oromia regional government violated economic, social, and cultural rights of citizens and domestic legislation protecting human rights and property rights. The EHRCO stated the government's demolition and forced eviction campaign in parts of Addis Ababa, Sheger City, and Adama town administrations in Oromia left 111,811 households disposed of their homes since October 2022. On July 27, the Ethiopian Institute of the Ombudsman stated it had received more than 100,000 complaints from persons whose homes were demolished. On March 31, the EHRC stated despite the government's claim of targeting only "illegal houses," the demolition included those with proper title deeds and with appropriate legal backing. The EHRC further asserted the demolition lacked warning, consultation with communities, and compensation.

### **H. ARBITRARY OR UNLAWFUL INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE**

The law generally required authorities to obtain court-issued search warrants prior to searching private property, although the government did not always enforce this. The law also recognized exceptions for “hot pursuit” cases in which a suspect entered premises or disposed of items that were the subject of an offense committed on the premises. This legal exception also applied when police had reasonable suspicion that evidence of a crime punishable if convicted by more than three years’ imprisonment was concealed on or in the property and a delay in obtaining a search warrant could allow for the evidence to be removed. Freedom House reported the government used location tracking and other technical means to surveil online and telephone communications of individuals, including politicians. Digital surveillance and the use of individual informants to spy on citizens was reportedly widespread. Authorities purchased an Israeli surveillance system from the company Cellebrite, which they had reportedly used to hack into the mobile phones of detainees since 2021. In addition, the government had partially or fully blocked internet services, blocked or filtered websites for political reasons, and there was reportedly no mechanism to appeal website blocking.

There were reported break-ins into offices of local human rights groups and private media that appeared critical of the government, including the February 13 burglary of the EHRCO office. That incident targeted a single laptop where documents for a human rights investigation were reported to have been stored. On July 17, another local group, the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD), called on responsible authorities to protect civic society and media offices after unidentified robbers broke into the office of the *Ethiopia Insider*, a private online media platform. CARD recounted similar targeted robberies during the year on civil society organizations and media and stated it had become a major threat to the civic and media space. In a July 17 statement, *Ethiopian Insider* reported the robbers broke into its office and stole valuable newsroom equipment critical for its operation. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) on July 18 expressed concern regarding the robbery and urged authorities to investigate the incident credibly and ensure accountability. By the end of the year, the government had yet to announce what kind of actions it was taking to protect media and civil society organizations.

## I. CONFLICT-RELATED ABUSES

The November 2022 COHA brought an end to active hostilities between the Tigray People’s Liberation Front and the ENDF in the northern part of the country, although violence in Amhara, Oromia, and elsewhere threatened a fragile peace, and there were some reports of violence in Tigray. On August 4, the government imposed a state of emergency, under which numerous violations were reported.

The September 18 report by ICHREE identified grave and systematic violations of international law and crimes committed in Tigray, as well as in Amhara, Afar, and Oromia regions. Violations included mass killings, rape, starvation, forced displacement, and arbitrary detention. According to ICHREE, the conflict in Tigray had not ended, with Eritrean troops and Amhara militias engaging in violations.

**Killings:** During the year, government counterinsurgency campaigns against the Fano militia in Amhara Region, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Oromia, and militias in the Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella regions continued, with numerous reports of unlawful killings, including killings of civilians. In addition, there were reports of extrajudicial killings by the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) and regional militia in Tigray, as well as reports of killings of civilians by other militia groups.

On August 18, Amnesty International stated it had received allegations ENDF airstrikes had resulted in mass killings in Finote Selam, Bahir Dar, and Shewa Robit. Independent media called on the government to grant access to the Amhara Region for independent investigators. Reuters reported members of the ENDF, who entered the town of Majete in Amhara Region after two weeks of fighting with Fano militia in the area, went on a house-to-house search on September 3 and killed approximately two dozen civilians including children and the elderly. On September 15, the EHRC reported what it called “seriously concerning” and “widespread” extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions in the Amhara Region. According to the EHRC, from July 31 to September 9,



the ENDF committed extrajudicial killings of civilians and allegedly captured members of Fano militia in nine towns (Adet, Debre Markos, Debre Tabor, Jiga, Lemi, Majete, Merawi, Mertolemariam, and Shewa Robit) of the Amhara Region. On September 11, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said more than 200 individuals were reportedly killed after the declaration of State of Emergency in Amhara.

In June media reported government security forces extrajudicially killed two civilians in Benishangul-Gumuz Region. After a video of the execution created public outcry, the EHRC described it as an “extrajudicial execution” and promised to investigate.

On February 15, the Oromo Legacy Leadership and Advocacy Association (OLLAA) alleged government security forces killed 23 individuals in January.

In August media and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) – an opposition political party – reported government security forces had committed extrajudicial killings in the Oromia Region. On August 14, the OFC told VOA Amharic security forces had killed at least 12 civilians during operations the prior week in Chobe district of the West Shewa zone in Oromia. Access to western Oromia was extremely restricted, imposing constraints on access to information. On November 2, BBC Amharic reported extrajudicial killings of three civilians in East Shewa zone of Oromia by security forces.

On February 28, the Washington Post reported Eritrean soldiers killed more than 300 civilians days before the COHA to end the northern conflict. On September 4, Amnesty International reported Eritrea extrajudicially executed 24 civilians in Kokob Tsibah district following the COHA. Unidentified groups of militants reportedly carried out attacks and killings of civilians in various parts of Oromia, Gambella, and Benishangul-Gumuz throughout the year. Local militia groups in Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Sidama, and Central Ethiopia regions reportedly carried out attacks and killings of civilians as part of long-running regional boundary disputes and intercommunal conflicts. The OLA and Fano militia reportedly killed civilians and government officials in many parts of Amhara and Oromia, especially in western Oromia.

In a June 1 HRW report entitled *Ethiopia: Ethnic Cleansing Persists Under Tigray Truce*, HRW alleged the extrajudicial killings of Tigrayan detainees by Amharan forces in western Tigray, among other abuses.

**Abductions:** Government actors reportedly abducted journalists, activists, artists, and others who criticized its security operations and the humanitarian situation resulting from conflict. Eritrean forces reportedly abducted Tigrayans in northern Ethiopia where the two countries shared borders and the EDF maintained its forces. Thousands of Tigrayans reportedly were arbitrarily detained in western Tigray at unknown locations.

On June 1, HRW reported that since the outbreak of the armed conflict in northern Ethiopia in 2020, a mix of security forces, in particular the irregular Fano militia and Amhara forces, had systematically rounded up thousands of ethnic Tigrayans. They reportedly detained ethnic Tigrayan citizens for prolonged periods without charge in police stations, prisons, military camps, and other unofficial sites including warehouses and schools throughout the western Tigray zone. Security forces and interim authorities also reportedly expelled hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans toward central Tigray. Additionally, the EHRC in July stated it was investigating at least seven cases of enforced disappearance in the Oromia Region, including a resident of Gobu Seyo district in West Wollega Zone, whose whereabouts was unknown after police claimed to have transferred him to a detention center in the town of Nekemte on June 16.

Throughout the year media reported increased incidents of kidnapping of civilians by armed groups including by the OLA for ransom and other reasons. On May 29, VOA Amharic spoke with truck drivers who said between mid-April and the end of May, unidentified gunmen killed five drivers and their assistants after they were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen, even though family members paid the demanded ransom.

**Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture:** According to HRW, OLLAA, and media reports, both the government and militias in Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray engaged in torture and ill-treatment of civilians and captured combatants. Victims were reportedly beaten with electric cables and metal pipes, detained incommunicado, threatened with guns to their heads, and deprived of food and water. Civilians in western Tigray were reportedly tortured and ill-treated mainly because of their ethnic identities. Elsewhere, captured soldiers and fighters, as well as civilians suspected of providing support to them, were reportedly tortured.

In its September 18 report, ICHREE documented rape and sexual violence by both EDF and Amhara forces since the COHA and found reasonable grounds to believe EDF members bore primary responsibility for continuing crimes of rape and sexual violence against women and girls in Tigray. ICHREE reported EDF-perpetrated sexual and gender-based violence had been abetted or tolerated by the federal government, which had failed in its legal duty to protect its population from violations by a foreign army, or by Amhara militia present in the areas of western and southern Tigray.

In July 2022, the EHRC reported gender-based violence including sexual violence occurred in all conflict-affected areas of the country. Some organizations reported conflict-induced displacement led to increased reports of rape and sexual violence including sexual slavery and sexual exploitation and abuse. The government reportedly detained thousands of ethnic Amhara and Oromo after the August 4 state of emergency, and there were reports many detainees were held in inhuman and at times life-threatening conditions and subjected to torture.

On September 18, ICHREE stated it had uncovered widespread arrests and detentions of Oromo civilians accused of having links with the OLA. The detentions documented between 2020 and February 2023 were perpetrated primarily by the federal or regional police, Oromia Special Forces, and at times the ENDF, and were accompanied by torture and mistreatment. Family members of suspected OLA fighters were also targeted for arrest and detention – including women who experienced sexual violence while in custody. Arrests, detentions, and killings often took place against a backdrop of curfews and restrictions on movement, contributing to an overarching climate of fear. Large areas of Oromia appeared to have been administered through the mandate of militarized Command Posts, whether or not State of Emergency legislation was in force.

According to the Conduct in UN Field Missions online portal, there were two open allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by the country's peacekeepers deployed to a UN peacekeeping mission: one submitted in 2018 allegedly involving an exploitative relationship with an adult in the UN Mission in Liberia, and one submitted in late 2020 allegedly involving transactional sex in the UN Interim Security Force in Abyei. By 2021, the United Nations had substantiated the 2018 allegation and repatriated the perpetrator, but the government had not yet reported accountability measures taken. Concerning the 2020 allegation, the United Nations had taken an interim action (suspension of payments), but results of the investigation remained pending, as was any final action.

**Other Conflict-related Abuse:** In April it was discovered food aid intended for the inhabitants of Tigray suffering under famine-like conditions was being diverted and sold on the local market. In June international actors including the United Nations suspended food aid to Ethiopia following a determination that a widespread and coordinated campaign was diverting food assistance from the persons who needed it to be sold in the market. In its September 2022 report, ICHREE found grounds to believe the federal government and regional state governments had implemented a range of measures designed to systematically deprive the population of Tigray and other populations of political opponents of material and services indispensable for their survival, including health care, shelter, water, sanitation, education, and food. International actors announced the resumption of food aid in November.

In June HRW reported that interim authorities in control of western Tigray, as well as Amhara authorities and forces, intended to push Tigrayans out of “this land” and east across the Tekeze river (a natural boundary with the Northwestern Zone of Tigray). According to HRW, these forces, engaged in the forcible transfer of hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans from the territory. On August

29, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated it received allegations Amhara police supported by local militia and the Wolkait youth detained at least 250 Tigrayans in the disputed area of western Tigray and forced them into areas controlled by the Tigray interim administration, until the ENDF intercepted the individuals and gave them a choice to return to western Tigray or remain where they were.

## Section 2.

### Respect for Civil Liberties

#### A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

The constitution and law provided for freedom of speech, including for members of the press and other media. The government's respect for this right deteriorated, especially in response to the conflict in the northern part of the country and with the conflicts in Amhara and Oromia regions. International organizations including the International Federation of Journalists, the CPJ, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and Freedom House reported a decline in press freedom.

RSF reported recent press freedom gains had been lost since the country became embroiled in ethnic conflicts and a civil war, despite the COHA. Journalists reportedly feared reprisals, as many journalists had been killed under unclear circumstances. Many reporters whose coverage did not support the government narrative were detained on serious charges such as "promoting terrorism and extremism."

In July CARD commissioned a study entitled *Media Space and the State of Media Associations*, which found an increasingly narrowing media space in the country. The study stated, "Owing to the environment of conflict, access to information has increasingly become challenging; harassment and arbitrary detention of journalists has become a common practice; and mobility of journalists has been curtailed."

**Freedom of Expression:** During the year, the government restricted criticism, especially regarding internal conflicts. The government sometimes did not allow journalists access to Tigray and restricted their access to other conflict zones. According to media reports, federal government officials warned members of the press against reporting misinformation or "promoting the terrorist and extremist group's agenda."

In September the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center stated that beginning in January there were 30 incidents of arrest that involved journalists and human rights activists. The center reported that during the year dozens of journalists were subjected to detentions and serious criminal charges, including terrorism charges, for exercising freedom of expression and performing their journalistic duties. Nevertheless, authorities often subsequently dropped charges, including terrorism charges, demonstrating the charges were only used to silence and create fear among human right defenders, the EHRC asserted.

The law prohibited dissemination of hate speech or disinformation through broadcasting, print, or social media using text, image, audio, or video. Conviction of a crime described under the law was punishable with imprisonment for no more than two years or a substantial monetary fine. A person convicted of violating the misinformation law could face no more than one year in prison or a substantial monetary fine. If their action resulted in a person or group being attacked due to hate speech, the punishment for conviction could be between one year and five years of incarceration. If a person was convicted of hate speech or disinformation via broadcasting services, print media, or a social media account of more than 5,000 followers, the violator faced one to three years in prison or a substantial monetary fine.

On June 9, security forces detained filmmaker Yonas Berhane Mewa after an actress displayed an artwork showing a bullet wound on her head and barbed wire on her mouth in an award ceremony.

**Violence and Harassment:** On May 3, the EHRC commissioner reported an increasing trend of harassment of journalists and restriction of media freedom, including the recent arrest of eight journalists. On May 8, the EHRC commissioner expressed concern for the growing trend of detentions and harassment of opposition voices in the country, including journalists and opposition political leaders.

On April 14, the CPJ reported at least eight journalists were detained, including Meskerem Abera, Genet Asmamaw, Abay Zewdu, Tewodros Asfaw, Dawit Begashaw, and Assefa Adane, amid renewed unrest in the country. According to the CPJ, Abay, Genet, Assefa, and Meskerem mainly reported on political and social issues affecting the Amhara ethnic group. The CPJ reported five Federal Police officers arrested Genet on April 6. Her lawyer, Henok Aklilu, said the police officers harassed and beat her during the arrest. In an audio clip published by several media outlets and authenticated by Henok, an officer said, “Beat her; kick her,” and Genet said, “Do not beat me. Why are you hitting me? Why are you kidnapping me without a court order?” On April 7, Genet appeared at the Federal First Instance Court and was accused of inciting violence on social media and other platforms and mobilizing young persons to overthrow the government, according to her lawyer. Throughout the year, there were multiple reports of arrests and rearrests of journalists, denial of release by police after a court decision to release them on bail, and reversal of lower court decisions by higher courts because of pressure from the executive or the army.

On March 8, a Federal High Court acquitted journalist Temesgen Dessalegn, editor of the privately owned magazine *Feteh*, on all three charges the attorney’s office brought against him. *Ethiopia Insider* reported the court decided Temesgen was innocent of the charge related to “disseminating disinformation,” as he was cleared from two earlier accusations, including disclosing military secrets to the public. Police arrested Temesgen in May 2022 and denied multiple court orders to release him on bail. In November 2022, the Federal Prison Administration followed court orders and released Temesgen. In September the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center reported Temesgen was detained twice during the year in relation to the charges he was acquitted for and released after hours of questioning and harassment by police.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** While independent media were active, reports of harassment, intimidation, and other restrictions of journalists critical of the government – especially its response to internal conflicts – were widespread. The Ethiopian Media Authority restricted some freedom of expression for members of the press.

Ethnic, regional, and political considerations were reportedly a major concern at many media outlets to the detriment of independent, pluralistic, and balanced journalism. Regional news agencies and social media influencers amplified messages that led to “echo chambers,” which often were biased towards ethnic interests. News agencies reportedly withheld, underreported, downplayed, or discredited reports of abuses against rival ethnic groups.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** According to the NGO End Blasphemy Laws, the law provided criminal sanctions for blasphemy or scoffing at religious places or ceremonies.

**National Security:** The government charged some journalists on national security grounds.

On May 6, the Ethiopian Security and Intelligence taskforce stated it had detained activist and journalist Gobeze Sisay from Djibouti, who was listed among a dozen “wanted” individuals whom the government suspected of committing “terrorism” related offenses. The government claimed Gobeze was collaborating with “extremist forces to dismantle the constitutional order in the Amhara Region.” According to the CPJ, Gobeze appeared before the Lideta branch of the Federal High Court in Addis Ababa on May 9 and 10 where police accused him of terrorism and leading the media propaganda wing of an unnamed extremist group.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government periodically restricted and disrupted access to the internet and blocked social media sites, especially in areas affected by conflict. In February the government blocked selected social media sites throughout the country for approximately five months, degrading citizens' rights to expression and access to information. The government's outsized influence on the telecommunications sector – through state-owned EthioTelecom – enabled it to control the online media space by leveraging nationwide and regional shutdowns. The opening of telecom service to foreign companies did not immediately affect internet freedom; Safaricom Ethiopia started service in August.

In August the government blocked internet services in much of the Amhara Region. In September the government started to suspend telecom services in parts of the Amhara regions where fighting between the ENDF and Fano militia was reported.

In response to recurrent killings of civilians in western Oromia and other areas of the country, the government reportedly blocked communications, making it difficult for media to report and verify information for human rights organizations.

## **B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION**

The constitution and law provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights. Permission to hold peaceful rallies was required. Holding unrecognized rallies could result in legal liability.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

Demonstrations were infrequent. When sustained demonstrations did occur, they often reflected an important shift in the political environment. The *Addis Standard* on March 3 reported Oromia police killed at least three persons in Guji Zone during a protest against a new subregional administration structure. Residents of Guji told media they were protesting the incorporation of Negele Town and three other districts from Guji Zone into the newly formed East Borena Zone following the February 27 decision of the Oromia Regional Council before police responded with force to disperse the crowd.

On June 1, the EHRC reported security forces' excessive use of force on civilians led to numerous deaths. The EHRC stated on May 26 police had arrested more than 140 individuals alleging participation in "violent demonstrations" against the demolition of mosques in Sheger City of Oromia at the Grand Anwar Mosque in Addis Ababa. Similarly, on June 2, security forces killed three members of the Islamic community in Addis Ababa following a disagreement as police had encircled the Grand Anwar Mosque during a Friday prayer to prevent potential protest. In a follow-up statement the Security and Intelligence Joint Task Force confirmed the death of three civilians and alleged injury to 63 security officers. On June 3, thousands of Muslims attended the funeral ceremony of four Islamic community members killed by security forces in Addis Ababa.

On June 17, media reported Addis Ababa police dispersed a meeting of trade associations for persons with disabilities. Journalists from *The Reporter* on June 21 talked to members of the Addis Ababa disability associations who said six trade associations of persons with disabilities were gathered in a hotel meeting hall to discuss methods to protest the demolition of their businesses by the Addis Ababa City administration. The owner of the hotel told media that police requested the hotel management stop the meeting, claiming the associations did not have a proper permit for the meeting.

## **C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

## D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, migration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

**In-country Movement:** The government restricted movement in some areas, especially into and out of regions experiencing violence, including parts of Tigray, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, and western Oromia. Federal and regional authorities erected an extensive system of checkpoints on the road connecting regions to the center, which at times impeded travel for those seeking to deliver humanitarian assistance.

Throughout the year, the Oromia Region and Federal Police frequently restricted movement into the capital Addis Ababa during public holidays and similar events, citing security concerns. On January 7, media reported members of the Federal Police stationed at Alula Aba Nega Airport restricted residents of Tigray ages 16 to 70 from traveling to Addis Ababa.

On January 25, media reported Oromia police had restricted movement of youth from the Amhara Region through Oromia. According to the report, members of the regional police erected checkpoints and were turning away youth passengers traveling to Addis Ababa from Gojjam and Gondar areas of the Amhara Region. On February 13, news network DW Amharic talked to passengers who said they were forced to return to Dejen town of the Amhara Region as Oromia police at Goha Tsion checkpoint told them to return to their point of origin. Passengers told DW Amharic the ban included all types of passengers, including those traveling to Addis Ababa for medical treatment and permanent residents of Addis Ababa who had traveled to the Amhara Region for business.

**Foreign Travel:** There were reports government security officials without a court order occasionally banned individuals from leaving the country. In November 2022, BBC Amharic reported the government security forces at Bole International Airport denied exit to the former head of the Amhara Special Forces, Brigadier General Tefera Mamo, to seek medical treatment in Israel. On March 23, his wife told the BBC the government gave no reason for the ban, and it was not clear who sanctioned the order despite a persistent response from immigration officers at Bole International Airport that General Tefera was not permitted to leave the country.

## E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in expanding protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern in most regions of the country. Shortages of fuel, cash, and humanitarian aid supplies due to bureaucratic impediments created additional challenges in delivering humanitarian aid. New regulations requiring humanitarian NGOs to pay expensive import duties on vehicles further impeded the ability of humanitarian organizations to assist vulnerable populations in remote parts of the country.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government used a refugee status determination system for providing services and protection to refugees. UNHCR reported the government did not register Eritrean arrivals because it ceased granting prima facie recognition for Eritrean asylum seekers in 2020. This led to an increase in unregistered Eritrean asylum seekers with no access to basic services and at heightened risk of protection violations due to lack of a refugee status determination and attendant documentation.



The government, however, provided asylum to approximately 40,000 Sudanese and nearly 100,000 Somaliland asylum seekers during the year.

**Freedom of Movement:** The government provided refugees with limited freedom of movement, even if properly registered. Refugees benefitting from this out-of-camp policy faced limitations due to delays in the registration process.

## **F. STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)**

As of September, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix estimated there were 44 million IDPs in the country spread across 33,393 assessed and accessible sites, an increase from 2022 due to conflict and drought.

The IOM found IDPs had limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, and faced significant protection risks, including exposure to violence, lack of educational opportunities, and lack of health care. Months of high inflation combined with disruption of farming activities due to conflict and below-normal harvests resulted in rising commodity prices and spiraling levels of food insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition.

In March media reported a severe shortage of humanitarian support in the town of Debre Berhan town, Amhara Region, among 30,000 IDPs who were displaced from their neighborhoods in West Shewa, East, and West Wollega zones of Oromia Region. On September 20, the EHRC reported a "concerning shortage" of food provisions in the refugee and IDP camps and urged the government to work towards swift resumption of food aid, which was suspended due to a widespread and coordinated food diversion scheme. The resumption of international food assistance for refugees, IDPs, and other vulnerable populations was announced in November. In September media reported a resurgence of an ethnic conflict in the borders of the Somali and Oromia regions. The conflict, which affected Koloji IDP camp in Babile district, resulted in the killing of several persons, including women, children, and the elderly. Media reported the conflict continued for three days after government militia from the Oromia Region on September 18 launched an attack on the IDP camp within the Somali Region, which hosted 20,000 Somalis displaced from Oromia during a 2017 similar conflict.

For further information concerning IDPs in the country, please see the materials of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center: <https://www.internal-displacement.org>.

### **Section 3.**

## **Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution and law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

## **ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

**Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections:** Domestic and international nonpartisan observers generally agreed the 2021 elections were peaceful but cited irregularities, including security problems and large turnouts that overwhelmed polling stations across the country. Observers also noted the elections took place against a backdrop of grave instability, including interethnic and intercommunal violence, and an electoral process that was not free or fair for all citizens. While some major opposition parties boycotted the elections, observers assessed the result generally reflected the will of most citizens. In 2021, the National Election Board of Ethiopia held a second

round of elections in Somali, Harari, and the now defunct Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region.

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** Registered political parties were required to receive permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices. The law required parties to report “public meetings” and obtain permission for public rallies.

The government allowed opposition parties to participate in debates, hold rallies, and campaign actively, although there were reports of government abuses. In 2021, prior to the election, several political parties alleged government abuses against their candidates, including killings, attempted killings, beatings, arbitrary detention, and harassment. Some government organizations reportedly forced candidates to accept leave without pay on a mandatory basis. Opposition parties complained measures the government took against their candidates negatively affected their preparations for the election.

In 2021 two major political parties in Oromia boycotted the election. The Oromo Liberation Front pulled out, citing the jailing of some of its leaders and alleged closure of its offices by the government, including its headquarters in the capital. The Oromo Federalist Congress withdrew from the election on similar grounds.

More opposition parties withdrew from the second round of the elections in 2021, citing unfair conditions, including the Ogaden National Liberation Front, the Freedom and Equality Party, and the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice party. Although some reports characterized the election process as not conducive for opposition parties, opposition parties won 12 seats in the House of People's Representative.

**Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups:** No laws prevented women or members of minority groups from voting or participating in political life, although patriarchal customs, religious factors, and family commitments limited women's participation in political life in some cases. Since same-sex activity was illegal, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons did not identify themselves in political activity and did not openly participate. During election periods, women experienced more psychological abuse and physical violence in comparison to men. Women were also more likely to experience sexual harassment within political party structures or when running for office.

Although many women went to the polls in the 2021 election, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) reported the environment at polling stations put women at risk of harassment and violence. The association stated the extension of voting time until 9 p.m. had a disproportionately negative impact on women voters, observers, and officials because women faced a higher risk of sexual harassment and gender-based violence at night. The association also explained that the long lines left women voters at higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment.

The Federation of Ethiopia Associations of Persons with Disabilities noted accessibility for persons with disabilities was hindered. Local human rights organizations also reported millions of IDPs could not participate in the election because the election board did not establish polling places in displacement camps.

## Section 4.

### Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for conviction of corruption, but the government did not implement the law effectively or comprehensively. There were numerous reports of government corruption, especially in relation to international humanitarian food assistance.



In November 2022, the government categorized corruption as a threat to the country's national security and formed a National Anti-Corruption Committee led by the country's intelligence chief, Temesgen Tiruneh.

**Corruption:** In March a massive food aid corruption scheme was uncovered showing officials at all levels of government were diverting UN and other international food assistance intended for humanitarian purposes and instead using the food to support security forces and selling it on the open market.

In December 2022, the Ministry of Justice announced it had filed grand corruption charges against four employees of the National Intelligence and Security Service for procuring cement from factories at a low price on the basis of national security and selling it at higher price in the local market. During the year, the individuals were charged with serious corruption and abuse of power. In November a federal court ruled the four individuals guilty and sentenced them from one to two and half years of imprisonment. On October 18, the government arrested 41 employees working in its Immigration Nationality and Vital Events Agency, including the agency's Deputy Director Tamiru Gembeta, alleging corruption in passport issuance services.

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

## Section 5.

### Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

While a variety of domestic and a few international human rights groups operated in the country, persistent insecurity and government-imposed access restrictions limited the groups' ability to conduct investigations and publish their findings on human rights cases, and some international human rights investigators faced threats and intimidation from security forces. Domestic human rights investigators faced regular intimidation from security forces. Authorities limited the access of domestic and international human rights organizations, media, humanitarian agencies, and diplomatic missions in certain geographic areas. Government officials were particularly sensitive to any investigation or reporting connected to areas of internal conflict. Civil society organizations operated in a narrowing civic space with expanding conflicts and repeated state of emergency declarations since 2020. Domestic human rights organizations operated with limited capacity and practiced self-censorship due to fear of government retaliation.

**Retribution against Human Rights Defenders:** During the year, human rights defenders received threats and violence for reporting, especially on issues related to internal conflict and freedom of expression.

**The United Nations or Other International Bodies:** Throughout the year, the government refused to cooperate with the ICHREE, impeding its ability to carry out its UN mandate.

Despite the COHA, the government prevented the ICHREE from conducting onsite investigations on conflict-related violations across the country, including Tigray.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The Office of the Ombudsman had the authority to investigate complaints regarding administrative mismanagement by executive branch offices and officials and to investigate prison conditions. A 2019 proclamation gave foreign nationals the right to present administrative complaints or rights abuse cases to the office.

The EHRC was an independent federal state body accountable to parliament and responsible for investigating and reporting on the country's human rights. The EHRC had the jurisdiction to

observe elections. The law required EHRC senior staff to be funded as full-time employees. The EHRC investigated human rights abuses across the country. The EHRC faced restrictions regarding access to conflict-affected areas and visiting detention centers during a state of emergency, but it was able to criticize the government for disregarding the rule of law and abusing human rights, including through ethnic profiling, arbitrary arrests of journalists, and ethnically and politically motivated killings. International human rights experts, however, accused the EHRC of systematic bias against Tigrayans when reporting on the conflict and of deliberately censoring information regarding alleged atrocities attributed to the government and its allies. In some instances, federal and regional government bodies appeared to follow EHRC reports and recommendations in taking corrective measures in response to human rights violations and abuses.

## Section 6.

### Discrimination and Societal Abuses

#### WOMEN

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalized rape and provided for a penalty of five to 20 years' imprisonment if convicted, depending on the severity of the case. The law did not expressly address spousal rape. The government did not fully enforce the law. The law generally covered violence against a marriage partner or a person cohabiting in an irregular union without specifically mentioning spousal rape. Some judges interpreted this article to cover spousal rape cases, but others overlooked such cases.

International and local human rights organizations reported alarming levels of rape and sexual violence by all parties in the context of the conflict in the northern part of the country and the continued armed conflicts across different parts of the country.

In its July 2022 annual report, the EHRC indicated pervasive incidents of gender-based violence across the country and stated impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence was a problem. According to the EHRC's report, women and children were targeted and exposed to a wide range of human rights violations and abuses in Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Oromia. In its second annual report in July, the EHRC reported on the increased abduction and sexual violence in the Sidama Region, including of children.

In October 2022, the United Nations Population Fund reported close to six million individuals needed services for gender-based violence, an increase from 3.5 million in 2021. The need was greatest in regions affected by conflict, drought, and floods. The report indicated women and girls accounted for most survivors seeking services, with gender-based violence against men and boys also recorded although highly underreported. According to the report, access to multisectoral services for women and girls was low due to fear of stigma, access to services, and lower service availability. In October 2022, the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation at Washington University reported survivors of conflict-related sexual violence lacked access to critical support services such as sexual and reproductive health care, psychosocial support, and safe shelter due to limited access to conflict-affected areas.

In June the EHRCO called for accountability for sexual and gender-based violence cases. The EHRCO's statement followed the reported release of a young accountant who was abducted for nine days by the personal bodyguard of the Hawassa city mayor. The EHRCO stated such cases were increasing due to impunity and called on the Sidama regional police to apprehend the suspect and for stakeholders working on women's rights to oppose abduction and forced marriages. At year's end, the perpetrator was arrested and was awaiting trial.

On January 8, seven local civil society organizations working on human rights reported increased gender-based violence throughout 2022, including physical assault, murder, and other forms of sexual violence against women. The organizations cited research commissioned by the EWLA that counted approximately 47 cases of murder and attempted murder, 32 cases of rape, and 158 physical assault crimes against women across different regions in 2022. The EWLA stated it had provided free legal support services to more than 13,000 women including victims of domestic violence within a year.

Domestic violence was illegal, but government enforcement of the law was inconsistent. Depending on the severity of injuries inflicted, penalties for conviction ranged from small monetary fines to 15 years' imprisonment. Domestic violence, including spousal abuse, was a pervasive social problem. According to the 2016 *Demographic and Health Survey*, 34 percent of married women and girls between ages 15 and 49 had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence from spouses.

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C):** The law criminalized the practice of clitoridectomy and provided for three months' imprisonment or a monetary fine if convicted. Conviction of infibulation of the genitals (the most extreme and dangerous form of FGM/C) was punishable by five to 10 years' imprisonment.

According to research by authors from the Amhara Public Health Institute and Bahir Dar University, published in 2021, the prevalence of FGM/C among girls from birth to age 14 was 18.6 percent, representing a decline compared with 24 percent reported in the Ethiopia *Demographic and Health Survey* conducted in 2005. The research also indicated FGM/C was still widely practiced across communities (16 percent among girls younger than age 14, and 65 percent among girls and women ages 15 to 49). The country was home to 25 million circumcised women and girls.

**Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment:** Marriage by abduction was illegal, although it reportedly continued in some regions despite the government's attempts to combat the practice. Abductions reportedly led to fighting among families, communities, and ethnic groups. In cases of abduction, the perpetrator did not face punishment if the survivor agreed to marry the perpetrator. The practice of forced marriage as a remedy for rape continued, although rape and forced marriage were illegal. These crimes were difficult to prosecute since they were usually settled outside courts of law. Some communities reportedly forced rapists to marry the survivor to protect her family's reputation. Rapists who married survivors escaped punishment and could also benefit from a lowered bride price demanded by the survivor's family. During the year, rights groups reported abductions were most common in Sidama Region.

Reports of sexual harassment were widespread. The law prescribed penalties of 18 to 24 months' imprisonment, but authorities generally did not enforce the law. The EHRC reported a wide range of factors that exacerbated sexual harassment, including conflict, drought, increased IDP populations, and inadequate working conditions for women in industrial parks.

**Discrimination:** The law provided for equal rights for women and men, both of whom had the same rights entering marriage, during marriage, and at the time of divorce. Discrimination against women was widespread. It was most acute in rural areas, where an estimated 80 percent of the population lived. Traditional courts applied customary patriarchal law in economic and social relationships.

All federal and regional land laws empowered women to access government land. Inheritance laws enabled widows to inherit joint property acquired during marriage; however, enforcement of both legal provisions was uneven.

Women's access to gainful employment, credit, and the opportunity to own or manage a business was limited by fewer educational opportunities and by legal restrictions on women's employment. These restrictions included limitations on working in occupations deemed dangerous and in specific industries such as mining and agriculture. There were several initiatives aimed at increasing women's access to these critical economic empowerment tools.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

The constitution protected the rights of women to access family planning resources and safeguard their health during pregnancy and childbirth. Social and cultural barriers limited women's access to reproductive health services. According to the 2016 *Demographic and Health Survey*, 85 percent of married or in-union women in the country made decisions on their health care; 94 percent had autonomy in deciding to use contraception; but only 53 percent could refuse to have sex with their partners, and the law did not protect this right. Overall, only 45 percent of married or in-union women ages 15 to 49 made their own decisions in all three key areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights: deciding on their own health care, deciding on the use of contraception, and saying no to sex, according to the report.

According to the 2019 *Ethiopia Mini Demographic and Health Survey* (EMDHS), 95 percent of women of reproductive age had access to family planning with modern methods. According to 2018 World Health Organization data, the country had an adolescent birth rate (per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19) of 79.5. The 2019 EMDHS showed on average, women ages 45 to 49 had given birth to 6.7 children. Despite nationwide access to contraception, negative cultural stigma around premarital sex reduced utilization of contraception. Transportation problems in remote areas of the country also reduced utilization of contraception. According to a small-scale survey in 2019, the modern contraception prevalence rate was 41 percent, up from 35 percent in 2016. Prevalence and utilization of contraception varied widely among regions.

Skilled health personnel attended 48 percent of births, according to 2019 EMDHS data. Although the government provided free maternal and child health services, problems related to resource constraints and poor transportation in remote areas persisted for women in accessing skilled health attendance during pregnancy and childbirth. Lack of skilled health attendance during pregnancy correlated with the country's high maternal mortality rate – 401 deaths per 100,000 live births according to 2017 World Health Organization data. Major causes of maternal mortality included hemorrhage, obstructed labor/ruptured uterus, pregnancy-induced hypertension, sepsis, and unsafe abortion.

Girls and women who had FGM/C were significantly more likely to have adverse obstetric outcomes, including maternal death. While access to some sexual and reproductive health services was available for survivors of gender-based violence at public-sector facilities, more comprehensive services for survivors – including legal and judicial support – were limited. Survivors of gender-based violence in areas impacted by the conflict in the northern part of the country faced lasting medical and mental health complications due to a lack of sexual and reproductive health services associated with the destruction of medical facilities and limitations on humanitarian access.

Social and cultural barriers related to menstruation and access to menstruation hygiene, as well as pregnancy and motherhood, limited girls' access to education.

## **SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION**

The constitution and law provided for equal protection to all persons without discrimination on grounds of race, nation, nationality, or other social origin. While the government generally enforced the law effectively, there were widespread allegations of government security forces targeting individuals for arrest and detention based on ethnicity in response to the conflict in the north of the country.

According to the most recent census, conducted in 2007, the country had more than 80 ethnic groups, of which the Oromo, at approximately 34 percent of the population, was the largest. An updated census was controversial; one was slated for 2019 but was postponed indefinitely. The federal system and constitution defined political boundaries based on ethnic considerations, but the documents themselves were not drawn along such boundaries. Many political parties were

primarily ethnic based, although the ruling party and one of the largest opposition parties were not organized along ethnic lines.

There were several reported cases of societal violence affecting members of national, racial, or ethnic minorities or groups. Ethnic-based violence reportedly intensified during the year in the Wollega zones of Oromia Region. The government blamed the attacks on the OLA, but the OLA rejected the accusation and demanded an independent investigation. In its September report to the Human Rights Council, the ICHREE noted allegations of ethnically based killings of hundreds of civilians in Oromia.

Ethnic conflict in Gambella Region between the Anuak and Nuer ethnic groups led to numerous deaths during the year. On July 18, an ethnic clash reportedly left at least 24 persons dead and dozens injured, while properties were destroyed and thousands were forced to flee their homes.

In August the government imposed a state of emergency, under which thousands of individuals were arbitrarily detained, many allegedly targeted on the basis of their Amhara ethnicity.

## CHILDREN

**Birth Registration:** A child's citizenship derived from the child's parents. The law required registration for children at birth. Children born in hospitals were registered; most of those born outside of hospitals were not. The overwhelming majority of children, particularly in rural areas, were born at home. The government continued a campaign initiated in 2017 to increase birth registrations by advising that failure to register would result in denial of public services. The *African Report on Child Wellbeing 2020*, published by the African Child Policy Forum, found birth registration was only 3 percent, making it difficult to determine girls' ages, and therefore to initiate legal action against perpetrators of sexual abuse and child marriage.

**Education:** The law did not make education compulsory. Primary education was universal and tuition free; however, there were not enough schools to accommodate the country's youth, particularly in rural areas and areas affected by conflict and drought. The cost of school supplies was prohibitive for many families. During the year, the city government of Addis Ababa provided school uniforms and supplies to students in all government schools. According to the most recent government data, more than 19 million children were enrolled at the primary level with a gross enrollment rate of approximately 100 percent. The high enrollment overburdened the education system, and student learning suffered. There were no significant differences in enrollment rates between boys and girls in primary schools according to the government data, but girls' enrollment and completion declined in the upper grades.

**Child Abuse:** Reports of child abuse were widespread. Uvula cutting, tonsil scraping, and milk-tooth extraction were among the most prevalent harmful traditional practices. The *African Report on Child Wellbeing 2020* found approximately 40 percent of girls were engaged in hazardous labor.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The law set the legal minimum age for marriage for girls and boys at 18. Authorities, however, did not enforce this law uniformly, and rural families sometimes were unaware of or disregarded this provision. Some regions worked on banning early marriages. Based on 2016 UNICEF data, 40 percent of women between ages 20 and 24 were married before age 18, and 14 percent were married before age 15. The government strategy to address underage marriage focused on education and mediation rather than punishment of offenders. In April 2022, UNICEF reported many girls in the country were forced to marry at a young age because of the worst drought the Horn of Africa had faced in 40 years. UNICEF recorded 2,282 cases of child marriage from September 2021 to March 2022, compared with 672 instances in the first half of 2021, showing a dramatic increase. In September the Amhara Region's women and children's affairs bureau stated there were more than 4,000 reported cases of child marriage in one year.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The minimum legal age for consensual sex was 18, but authorities did not enforce this law. The antitrafficking law criminalized child sex trafficking. Some



families and brothel owners reportedly exploited girls from the country's impoverished rural areas for domestic servitude and commercial sex. There were reports brothel owners exploited girls for commercial sex in Addis Ababa's central market.

**Infanticide, Including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities:** Ritual and superstition-based infanticide, including of infants with disabilities, continued in remote tribal areas, particularly in South Omo. Local governments worked to educate communities against the practice.

## ANTISEMITISM

The Jewish community numbered approximately 10,000 persons. The Addis Ababa Jewish community reported it believed it was protected by the government to practice its faith; however, the community at large faced societal discrimination. Multiple rural Jewish communities reported stigma against them, citing a belief Jews were possessed by demons, and difficulties in participating in daily life while publicly practicing Judaism.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## ACTS OF VIOLENCE, CRIMINALIZATION, AND OTHER ABUSES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS

**Criminalization:** The law criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct, and conviction was punishable by three to 15 years' imprisonment. In August there were several reports of arrests due to perceived same-sex sexual conduct, including of foreign citizens, and forced closure of businesses perceived to be LGBTQI+ friendly.

**Violence and Harassment:** There were reports of state and nonstate violence and harassment of LGBTQI+ persons. In August the Addis Ababa police department launched a hotline for citizens to report "illegal activities that deviate from the law and social values," while the city's tourism bureau warned hotels not to permit "homosexual activities" to take place on their premises. In May, after he was outed twice on a social media platform, an LGBTQI+ man in Addis Ababa was beaten by classmates and severely injured. There were no hate-crime laws or other criminal justice mechanisms to aid in the investigation of abuses against LGBTQI+ persons. Individuals generally did not publicly identify themselves as LGBTQI+ due to severe societal stigma and the criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct. Activists in the LGBTQI+ community reported surveillance, entrapment, and fear for their safety. Instances of harassment or violence against LGBTQI+ persons increased in frequency toward the end of the year.

**Discrimination:** There were high levels of societal discrimination nationwide against LGBTQI+ individuals, including in education, employment, and access to health care. LGBTQI+ individuals risked physical violence and ostracism if their sexual orientation was revealed. The social stigma and criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct made it difficult for LGBTQI+ persons to be open regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity.

On August 10, the Addis Ababa Security Bureau announced a crackdown on businesses identified as “hotspots for gay practices.” The bureau stated the measure followed information provided by the public through an anonymous hotline. The bureau vowed to continue to take measures on those committing “despicable acts that are hated by both man and God.” Foreign citizens reported harassment and threats to their personal and business livelihoods.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** Legal gender recognition was not available.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices:** There were reports of efforts to change the sexual orientation or gender identity or expression of LGBTQI+ persons through coerced participation in religious rituals or fasting.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:** State actors sought to prevent LGBTQI+ persons from assembling in public or private. The LGBTQI+ community was almost entirely underground due to risks of harassment and physical violence, although persons perceived to be LGBTQI+ were exposed via social media and threatened with violence, compelling them to limit their freedom of expression. Given local attitudes, human rights NGOs did not publicly advocate for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Many persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. The constitution did not mandate equal rights for persons with disabilities. Employment law prohibited discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities but did not explicitly mention intellectual or sensory disabilities. It was illegal for deaf persons to drive; despite the law, in April the government launched a program for the training and issuance of driver’s licenses for deaf persons. There were reports the government denied antenatal and postnatal care services, as well as vaccination, for children with disabilities.

Property owners were required to give persons with disabilities preference for ground-floor apartments, and they generally did so.

Nationally there were several schools for persons with hearing and vision disabilities and several training centers for children and young persons with intellectual disabilities. There was a network of prosthetic and orthopedic centers in five of the 10 regions.

The law did not restrict the right of persons with disabilities to vote and otherwise participate in civic affairs, although accessibility problems made participation difficult for some persons with more significant disabilities. Older persons, pregnant women, and nursing mothers received priority when voting. The Federation of Ethiopia Associations of Persons with Disabilities preliminary report on its observation of the 2021 elections noted accessibility for persons with disabilities was hindered and persons with disabilities required additional assistance to access 22 percent of the polling stations visited by observers.

On August 8, the Ethiopian Lawyers with Disabilities Association reported an increase in violations of rights of persons with disabilities and blamed the government for failing to hold officials accountable for the breach of the rights. The association demanded the government allocate a separate budget to protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

## OTHER SOCIETAL VIOLENCE OR DISCRIMINATION

Sporadic but deadly clashes occurred in the border area between Afar and Somali regions, between Oromia and Somali regions, and interethnic conflicts within the Gambella Region between Nuer and Anywa groups.

On July 23, the EHRC called for “urgent attention and concerted action of authorities to prevent further deterioration” in Gambella following an escalated interethnic conflict. The EHRC stated armed conflict between ethnic militias from Nuer and Anywa, and Murle ethnic militia from South Sudan resulted in civilian death and property destruction. In July journalists from *The Reporter* talked to residents in the area who said at least 60 civilians and eight police officers had died due to the conflict. Similarly, on February 7, Gambella regional officials reported ethnic Murle militiamen from South Sudan killed two and injured one. VOA Amharic talked to the head of the regional security office, Utow Ukot, who said militiamen crossed from South Sudan into the Gog district of Gambella and raided a farm and killed civilians. Security forces were reportedly deployed to the border to prevent repeated cross-border attacks.

Societal stigma and discrimination against persons with HIV or AIDS continued in education, employment, and community integration. Persons with HIV or AIDS reported difficulty accessing various services. There were no statistics on the scale of the problem.

## Section 7.

### Worker Rights

#### A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The constitution and law provided workers, except for civil servants and certain categories of workers primarily in the public sector, with the right to form and join unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. Other provisions and laws, however, severely restricted these rights. The law specifically prohibited managerial employees, teachers, health-care workers, judges, prosecutors, security-service workers, domestic workers, and seasonal agricultural workers from organizing unions. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and required employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination to reinstate workers dismissed for union activities.

A minimum of 10 workers was required to form a union. While the law provided all unions with the right to register, the government could refuse to register trade unions that did not meet its registration requirements. The law allowed for refusing registration for a union when union leaders were restricted from certain civil rights by court and when the union was not willing to replace them. There were no reports of a registration refused on this basis. The government could unilaterally cancel the registration of a union. Workers could not join more than one trade union per employment. The law stipulated a trade union organization could not act in an overtly political manner.

The law allowed administrative authorities to seek recourse via court actions to cancel union registration for engaging in prohibited activities, such as political action.

While the law recognized the right to collective bargaining, this right was severely restricted under the law. Negotiations aimed at amending or replacing a collectively bargained agreement had to take place within three months of its expiration; otherwise, the prior provisions on wages and other benefits ceased to apply. The law restricted enterprise unions to negotiating wages only at the plant level. Civil servants, including public-school teachers, had the right to establish and join professional associations created by the employees but could not bargain collectively. Arbitration procedures in the public sector were more restrictive than in the private sector. Penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for comparable crimes.

There were reports of protests by civil servants demanding three months’ unpaid salary, which resulted in the detentions of hundreds of civil servants in the former Southern Nations,



## Nationalities, and Peoples' Region.

Although the constitution and law provided workers with the right to strike to protect their interests, the law contained detailed provisions prescribing extremely complex and time-consuming formalities that made legal strike actions prohibitively difficult. The law required aggrieved workers to attempt to reconcile with employers before striking; it also included a lengthy dispute settlement process. These provisions applied equally to an employer's right to lock workers out. For a strike to be authorized, two-thirds of the workers were required to support such action. If not referred to a court or labor relations board, the union retained the right to strike without resorting to either of these options, provided they gave at least 10 days' notice to the other party and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and made efforts at reconciliation.

The law also prohibited strikes by workers who provided essential services, including air transport and urban bus services, electric-power suppliers, gasoline station personnel, hospital and pharmacy personnel, firefighters, telecommunications personnel, and urban sanitary workers. The list of essential services went beyond the International Labor Organization definition of essential services. The law prohibited retribution against strikers, but it also provided for civil or criminal penalties against unions and workers convicted of committing unauthorized strike actions. If the provisions of the penal code prescribed more severe penalties, the punishment for conviction codified in the penal code became applicable. Public servants who went on strike, urged others to go on strike, or failed to carry out their duties in a proper manner, to the prejudice of state, public, or private interest, were subject to imprisonment that involved forced labor.

Trade unions expanded their membership in special economic-zone industrial parks and successfully advocated for enforcement against antiunion discrimination and retaliation against workers attempting to organize and assert labor rights. Union-busting practices were widespread among employers. The informal labor sector, including domestic workers and seasonal agricultural workers, was not unionized or protected by labor law. Lack of adequate staffing prevented the government from effectively enforcing applicable laws for those sectors protected by law. Court procedures were often subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

Lawsuits alleging unlawful dismissal often took years to resolve because of case backlogs in the courts. Labor officials reported high unemployment, fear of retribution, and long delays in hearing labor cases deterred workers from participating in strikes and other labor actions. Two-thirds of union members belonged to the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions. Labor-sector stakeholders reported the confederation demonstrated increasing independence from the government.

## **B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **C. PROHIBITION OF CHILD LABOR AND MINIMUM AGE FOR EMPLOYMENT**

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

## **D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)**

## **E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** There was no national minimum wage, but the Ministry of Labor and Skills made progress toward establishing a national minimum wage with the support of the International Labor Organization by forming a minimum wage board. The minimum wage board included representatives from the government, employees, trade unions, and other stakeholders. Some government institutions and public enterprises set their own minimum wages. Public-sector employees, the largest group of wage earners, earned a monthly minimum wage that was above the poverty line. Workers in the country's industrial parks earned wages below the poverty line and reported working longer hours than the legal maximum. In 2022 the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions urged the government to establish a national minimum wage through different means, including through the media and an official letter to the prime minister.

The law provided for a 48-hour maximum legal workweek with a 24-hour rest period, premium pay for overtime, and prohibition of excessive compulsory overtime. Four conditions allowed employers to make use of overtime work: urgency of the task, danger, absence of an employee, and lack of alternatives. Additionally, employers could not engage their employees in overtime work exceeding two hours per day, 20 hours per month, and 100 hours per year. The law entitled employees in public enterprises and government financial institutions to overtime pay; civil servants received compensatory time off for overtime work. Most employees in the formal sector worked a 39-hour workweek, but only a small percentage of the population, concentrated in urban areas, was involved in wage-labor employment.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The government, industries, and unions negotiated occupational safety and health (OSH) standards, which did not fully address worker safety in many industries. Many workers specifically excluded by law from unionizing, including domestic workers and seasonal agricultural workers, reportedly did not benefit from health and safety regulations in the workplace. The Labor Ministry lacked detailed, sector-specific health and safety guidelines.

Hazardous working conditions existed in the agricultural sector, which was the primary base of the country's economy. There were also reports of hazardous and exploitative working conditions in the construction and industrial sectors, although data on deaths and injuries were not available.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** Overall, the government did not effectively enforce wage laws. Penalties were not commensurate with those for comparable violations of similar laws. The Labor Ministry's inspection department was responsible for enforcement of workplace standards. OSH measures were not effectively enforced. The ministry carried out some regular labor inspections to monitor compliance, but the government had an insufficient number of labor inspectors to enforce the law and did not effectively record or track violations.

The World Bank and the National Employment Policy and Strategy of Ethiopia reported the informal sector included more than 70 percent of urban workers. Although labor laws covered informal sector workers, the government did little to enforce the law in this sector.