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Country Policy and Information Note

Ethiopia: Opposition to the government

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive)/Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 02 July 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the state due to a person's actual or perceived opposition to the government.

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1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 For the purposes of this note, opposition to the government means membership or perceived membership of political parties and armed groups opposed to the ruling government.
- 1.2.2 For background information on those who may be perceived to be opponents of the state such as government critics, protesters, journalists, bloggers, human rights activists and civil society members see [Ethiopia: Background note](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 In July 2018, the Ethiopian government removed the June 2011 designation as terrorist organisations for 3 armed opposition groups: the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF); and Ginbot 7 (now frequently known as Arbegnoch Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement – AGUDM) (see [Designated terrorist organisations](#)).
- 2.2.2 Although the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United States have not designated these groups as terrorist organisations, they are known to have armed wings, or at least not to renounce violence. The situation in relation to arms and renouncing violence by these groups is, however, evolving (see [Former designated terrorist organisations](#)).

- 2.2.3 In the country guidance case of [MB \(OLF and MTA – risk\) Ethiopia CG \[2007\] UKAIT 00030 \(29 March 2007\)](#), heard 19 February 2007, promulgated 29 March 2007, the Upper Tribunal recognised that the OLF had been responsible for human rights violations. Although there have been many changes in the country situation since the promulgation of the caselaw, it may still continue to apply. Some elements of the OLF and those acting for the OLA have been connected to violence and decision makers should consider whether to exclude them from recognition as refugees or from humanitarian protection (para 66).
- 2.2.4 If there are serious reasons to consider that the person has been involved in terrorist activities, decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 2.2.5 If the person is excluded from the refugee convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.
- 2.2.6 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Actual or imputed political opinion.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the particular person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

a. Political opposition - general

- 2.4.1 The Prosperity Party (PP) is the ruling coalition party. In November 2019 Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed created the PP with 3 parties from the former Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition (which was dissolved) and 5 smaller parties. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which was the dominant party in the ERPDF, declined to join the PP. The ERPDF had ruled for over 20 years and won all 547 seats in the May 2015 general election (see [Ruling party – Prosperity Party \(formerly Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front \(EPRDF\)\)](#))
- 2.4.2 Political parties have existed since 1991. The TPLF are the only opposition party in the House of Peoples' Representatives after the dissolution of the ERPDF coalition. Although the 2015 election was generally peaceful, sources expressed concerns over constraints placed on opposition parties and supporters including censorship and imprisonment and exile, which prevented them from gaining momentum and obtaining any seats (see [Ethiopia: Background note](#))

- 2.4.3 In February 2018, the then Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned and was replaced by Abiy Ahmed on 2 April 2018. The new prime minister initially introduced a wave of reforms including:
- An opening up of the political environment and a shift in the government's stance towards the political opposition, freedom of speech
 - an improvement in the state's relationship with Eritrea
 - the release of thousands of political prisoners, including high profile and prominent party members and critics of the government
 - a decrease in arrests and confrontation with party members and protestors
 - a generally increased tolerance for political dissidents
 - an end to the 2018 State of Emergency (SOE) (see [Political landscape](#)).
- 2.4.4 This widened the political space and enabled dialogue between the government and opposition groups. There are however, tensions within the ruling coalition and security forces, in part due to the vast changes that have been implemented, and a slow-down in the reform process (see [Political landscape](#)).
- 2.4.5 The first regional and nationwide elections since Prime Minister Abiy came to power were scheduled for August 2020. These have since been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic with no new date agreed. However, sources consider that the changes made under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed including the new election law passed in August 2019, along with his asserted commitment to democratic polls, should allow opposition groups to prepare more freely for future elections. The government facilitated and accepted the results of a referendum on the future status of the Sidama zone in November 2019. Opposition groups have registered as political parties, including previously banned organisations such as the OLF, and over 100 competing political parties were signatories to a code of conduct with the government to work towards Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's aim of free, fair and credible elections (see [Political landscape](#)).
- 2.4.6 Historically, opposition political party leaders and members have been subject to surveillance, intimidation and harassment and some have faced discrimination in employment. This continues, but to a much lesser extent than under the previous government. Registered political parties are required to obtain permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices, and in the past applications were often refused or simply left unapproved. In 2019 at least one major opposition party reported it was able to open many offices in advance of the 2020 national election. Although the experiences of opposition groups differ depending on the political group, and the region and area they operate in, generally there has been an improvement in groups' ability to function and challenge the government (see [Discrimination and harassment](#)).
- 2.4.7 The government used the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP), particularly in the period before Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was appointed in April 2018, to suppress criticism by detaining and prosecuting opposition

figures, including prominent leaders of opposition political parties. Since then the ATP has been re-drafted and a revised version was adopted on 2 January 2020, with many of the blanket powers of arbitrary detention removed. However, the previous ATP was used in 2019 in particular in the arrest and detention of hundreds of individuals in a widespread and reactive response to an attempted coup in June 2019. This included those associated with, and members of, a range of opposition groups. While some remain in detention, the majority have subsequently been released or charged (see [Anti-terrorism legislation](#)).

- 2.4.8 Historically, opposition party members and activists have been subject to arbitrary arrest and lengthy detention without charge, ill treatment, torture and extrajudicial killings. In July 2018 Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed admitted the use of torture and unlawful interrogation techniques on those detained under the previous regime, and by the end of 2018 over 60 high level government officials had been arrested on charges of torture and corruption. The process to bring those to justice is reportedly slow and not wholly effective however, there have been examples of cases being prosecuted for past abuses. Since April 2018 approximately 10,000 political prisoners have been released and/or granted pardons, including prominent politicians, journalists and human rights activists (see [Political landscape](#), [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#), [Treatment of detainees/prison conditions](#)).
- 2.4.9 While some sources report hundreds of arrests for political reasons, particularly in Oromia, including low level supporters or sympathisers, they are usually held for a short time and then released, and the overall numbers of arrests have declined since April 2018. Additionally, while there are some reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees and of harsh detention conditions which vary between settings, there is also evidence that torture is no longer routine or widespread (see [Political landscape](#), [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#), [Treatment of detainees/prison conditions](#)).
- 2.4.10 In the country guidance case of [HB \(Ethiopia EDP/UEDP members\) Ethiopia CG \[2004\] UKAIT 00235](#), heard 12 July 2004, promulgated 25 August 2005, the Tribunal held that the country evidence did not support the claim that the United Ethiopian Democratic Party (UEDP), formerly Ethiopian Democratic Party, members were subject to 'routine persecution' (para 31).
- 2.4.11 The UEDP reverted back to 'the Ethiopian Democratic Party' (EDP) in 2009. Following the 2015 election the EDP has been largely inactive. However, in May 2019 EDP, along with 6 other opposition parties, dissolved itself to form a new party, the Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (E-ZEMA) (see [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ/E-ZEMA\)](#)).
- 2.4.12 Since HB was promulgated, particularly since April 2018, the political space has opened up and the government has shown increased tolerance and acceptance of opposition groups. The release of political prisoners, including high profile activists, the greater freedoms with which political parties are able to operate and government engagement with senior members of opposition groups indicates that the situation for opposition parties, their members and supporters has improved significantly, notably so for E-ZEMA (incorporating the former EDP and 6 other opposition parties). The UT's findings in HB that there is not routine persecution of UEDP members

remains consistent with the available country information (see [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ/E-ZEMA\)](#)).

- 2.4.13 In general, the available information indicates that members of political groups are not subject to treatment which by its nature and/or repetition amounts to persecution although this does vary by group and location (see consideration of formerly designated terrorist groups below). Each case must, therefore, be considered on its own facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they will be at risk of persecution, based on their profile, the political group they belong to, their political activities, their past experiences including any arrests (and the timing of, location of and their experience during of those arrests), and the proposed region and area of return.

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b. Formerly designated terrorist organisations

- 2.4.14 Members, or perceived members, of the OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 (also known as AGUDM, G7 or PG7), which were designated as terrorist organisations in 2011, have historically been subjected to surveillance, harassment, arrest and imprisonment, torture and ill-treatment. This treatment also sometimes extended to supporters and family members of supporters or those perceived to be affiliated with the groups (see [State of emergency](#) and [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#), [Ogaden National Liberation Front \(ONLF\)](#) and [Ginbot 7 \(G7\)/Arbegnoch \(Patriot\) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement \(AGUDM\)/Patriotic Ginbot 7 \(PG7\)](#) and [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ/E-ZEMA\)](#)).
- 2.4.15 However, during 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed removed the designation of these groups as terrorist organisations and welcomed high profile leaders and their groups back to Ethiopia. A number of high-profile prisoners have also been released and /or pardoned, including the deputy leader of Ginbot 7 who had been detained since 2014 (see [State of emergency](#) and [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#), [Ogaden National Liberation Front \(ONLF\)](#) and [Ginbot 7 \(G7\)/Arbegnoch \(Patriot\) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement \(AGUDM\)/Patriotic Ginbot 7 \(PG7\)](#) and [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ/E-ZEMA\)](#)).

i. Ginbot 7

- 2.4.16 Ginbot 7 no longer exists having dissolved itself to become part of E-ZEMA in May 2019 (see [Ginbot 7 \(G7\)/Arbegnoch \(Patriot\) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement \(AGUDM\)/Patriotic Ginbot 7 \(PG7\)](#) and [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ/E-ZEMA\)](#)).
- 2.4.17 In general, there is no evidence in the sources consulted that former Ginbot 7/PG 7 members are at risk of persecution for that reason alone and the onus will be on the person to demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution notwithstanding the background country information.

ii. ONLF

- 2.4.18 In August 2018, the ONLF declared a ceasefire and in October of that year signed a peace agreement with the government and were welcomed back to

the Somali Region (the Ogaden) in eastern Ethiopia ([see Ogaden National Liberation Front \(ONLF\)](#)).

2.4.19 The paramilitary group, the Liyu police, has operated with apparent impunity in the Somali and eastern Oromia regions and have been accused of human rights abuses against civilians who are viewed as supportive of the ONLF. However, since the arrest of former Somali regional president Abdi Illey in August 2018, Liyu police activities have dropped significantly. Jail Ogaden, where torture and human rights abuses occurred, has been closed; the government has taken positive action to reform and retrain the Liyu police; and there has been a decline in their involvement in attempting to influence local politics. Many ONLF fighters disarmed and returned to the region in 2018 and the group subsequently applied to register as a political party and have been able to function effectively in the Somali Regional State (SRS). According to a representative of the ONLF in 2019, arrests had occurred only in small numbers and were not comparable to the actions of the past government, and other sources consulted do not indicate that the group or its members are routinely facing harassment, arrest or other human rights violations by the state (see [The Liyu police and their treatment of people in the Somali Regional State \(SRS\) and eastern Oromia regions](#) and [Treatment of detainees/prison conditions](#)).

2.4.20 In general, the country information indicates a marked improvement from the past in regard to the state treatment of the ONLF and that members of the group are not generally subject to treatment amounting to persecution alone. The onus will be on the person to demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution notwithstanding the background country information.

iii. OLF

2.4.21 In the country guidance case of [MB \(OLF and MTA – risk\) Ethiopia CG \[2007\] UKAIT 00030 \(29 March 2007\)](#), heard 19 February 2007, promulgated 29 March 2007, the Upper Tribunal held that ‘... OLF members and sympathisers, and those specifically perceived by the authorities to be such members or sympathisers, will in general be at real risk of persecution if they have been previously arrested or detained on suspicion of OLF involvement. So too will those who have a significant history, known to the authorities, of OLF membership or sympathy.’ (para 66).

2.4.22 Since the country guidance determination in [MB](#), the country situation has improved. Following the removal of the OLF’s designation as a terrorist group in 2018, hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Addis Ababa to welcome back its leaders, although sources noted subsequent arrests. In April 2019 the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) split from the OLF political party and in May the OLF stated it would merge with the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC). In November 2019, the OLF registered with the election board (NEBE) as a political organisation, agreeing to work with other political parties in Oromia state. In January 2020, the OLF signed an agreement with the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and Oromo Nationalist Party (ONP) to form a coalition in the forthcoming elections (at the time of writing postponed indefinitely). However, some sources indicate that the OLF (and the OLA) may not be a single entity, but has fractured into a number of sub-groups and in some areas is not controlled by a single person or entity. OLF

sources told the Home Office in September 2019 that they operated in Addis Ababa and the surrounding area and had opened 40 offices in 2019 across the country, although 30 subsequently closed (see [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#)).

- 2.4.23 Armed members of the OLF – the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) – returned to Ethiopia in September 2018 and committed to laying down arms, with sources indicating that in February 2019, up to 1,000 members had entered government rehabilitation camps. However, integration and disarmament has reportedly been largely unsuccessful and there remain armed members of the OLA, no longer tied to the OLF, operating predominately in western and southern Oromia. After the split of the OLF and OLA in April 2019, there were reports of OLA fighters who had been promised amnesty being arrested and those who had completed rehabilitation being sent to detention centres (see [Oromo Liberation Army \(OLA\)/OLF fighters](#) and [Arrests and detention in Oromia and of OLF/Shene/OLA](#)).
- 2.4.24 Areas such as West Wollega and Guji, in western and southern Oromia respectively, have been subject to government and OLA (sometimes also referred to as ‘shene’, a faction of the OLA), clashes, violence and killings including of civilians, attributed to both sides. The federal government has established military ‘command posts’ in these areas in an attempt to counter the OLA threat. The OLA has been accused of abductions, assassinations of government officials, killings and lootings. There have been reports of OLA, ‘shene’ and OLF members and sympathisers being arrested and detained, as well as some being extra-judicially killed, in the areas around ‘command posts’ where there have been notably high levels of violence and fighting, particularly in western and southern Oromia (see [Oromo Liberation Army \(OLA\)/OLF fighters](#) and [Arrests and detention in Oromia and of OLF/Shene/OLA](#)).
- 2.4.25 Sources also report that there have been mass detentions – in the thousands out of a support base estimated by the OLF leadership to be 6 million – during 2019 in rehabilitation camps within Oromia, particularly Senkelle police camp near Ambo, mostly for short periods of time, with detainees being subjected to ‘re-education’ before release, including perceived OLF, OLA members or those considered as part of the armed faction ‘shene’. However, there is a lack of consistency amongst sources about the numbers, profile of detainees, and a lack of clarity about the time period in which the detentions occurred. Sources suggest multiple reasons for the arrests, including intimidation and to deter people from supporting the OLF. A number of the arrests are likely to be linked to continuing fighting between the OLA/‘shene’ armed elements and the government in western and southern Oromia. There are also reports of a small number of arrests in Addis Ababa of OLF members and leaders associated with the OLA, including a former OLA commander. The country evidence is, however, unclear whether those arrested in general have been arrested previously or have been arrested because of a known history of involvement with the OLF (see [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#), [Oromo Liberation Army \(OLA\)/OLF fighters](#) and [Arrests and detention in Oromia and of OLF/Shene/OLA](#)).

- 2.4.26 The country information indicates that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from UT's findings in [MB](#). Since 2004, there has been a fundamental change in the legal status of the OLF now that designation as a terrorist organisation has been removed by the state, its leaders and exiled members have been able to return to Ethiopia, and it has been able to register as a political party in anticipation of national elections, opening offices and is able to operate and work with other political parties. OLF supporters and members do continue to face harassment and arrest from the state however, the available evidence does not indicate that all OLF activists, members or supporters – which may number in the hundreds of thousands to millions – throughout Ethiopia are at risk of treatment amounting to persecution by its nature and/or repetition. The assessment of risk for a person will vary between different areas of Ethiopia and within Oromia itself. OLF members or supporters in Oromia, particularly in areas where armed conflict between the OLA and the armed forces continues, face a higher risk of treatment that amounts to persecution than those in Addis Ababa.
- 2.4.27 In general, a person who is a member or supporter of the OLF is not at risk of persecution for that reason alone. Instead each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they will be at risk of persecution based on their profile, political activities, past experiences including any arrests (and the timing of, location of and their experience during those arrests), and the proposed place of return.

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c. Protestors

- 2.4.28 The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly. However, under State of Emergency regulations (SOE) (at the time of publication, the most recent being implemented on 8 April 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic) demonstrations were prohibited. Protesters have been subjected to harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention. The previous SOE imposed in February 2018 was lifted in June 2018 and, although one source indicated a rise in protests at this time (as the restriction was lifted), it also noted a decline in confrontations between state forces and protestors. Although some demonstrations have been violent in 2019 and early 2020 including deaths of protestors by security forces, this has largely been due to group clashes and communal violence. The government has shown increased restraint with protestors and police have provided security to large peaceful demonstrations (see [Freedom of expression and assembly](#), [Treatment of detainees/prison conditions](#) and [State of emergency](#)).
- 2.4.29 A person who was simply a participant in a protest is unlikely to be of ongoing interest to the authorities. The onus is on the person to show that their profile, activities and/or past treatment at the hands of the state are such that the authorities are likely to view them adversely and subject them to treatment amounting to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.30 For assessment in relation to the Oromo protests see the country policy and information note on [Ethiopia: Oromos](#)

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they are unlikely to be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Decision makers must carefully consider the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person. However, where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, it is unlikely to be reasonable to expect them to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see the [Certification of protection and human rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 16 May 2020

3. Political landscape: 2018 onwards

For an overview of the political system see [Ethiopia: Background note](#)

3.1 Change of prime minister

3.1.1 The United States Department of State (USSD) 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Ethiopia' (USSD report 2019) published 11 March 2020 covering events in 2019 noted: 'In February 2018 then prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced his resignation to accelerate political reforms in response to demands from the country's increasingly restive youth. In April 2018 parliament selected Abiy Ahmed Ali as prime minister to lead broad reforms.'¹

3.1.2 The Washington Post in the article 'Ethiopia's prime minister resigns amid political turmoil' dated 15 February 2018 noted:

'Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn submitted his resignation Thursday in an apparent bid to ease political turmoil... According to the state-run Ethiopian News Agency, Desalegn resigned both as prime minister and chairman of the ruling party "to be part of the efforts to provide a lasting solution to the current situation."

'In his speech, Desalegn noted that people were displaced and injured, and property was damaged in the recent unrest. He said he believed that his resignation was necessary to carry out democratic reforms that are underway.

'Desalegn was seen as a caretaker and consensus figure without a great deal of power, implementing the orders of more influential figures in the army and the ruling Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front... The ruling party, of which Desalegn was once chairman, has also faced internal divisions as parties representing the other ethnic regions, particularly the Oromo and the Amhara, jockey for position.'²

3.1.3 For background information and a timeline in relation to prime minister Dr Abiy Ahmed Ali, known as Abiy Ahmed, see the BBC article '[Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister](#)'³, [Congressional Research Service publication 'In Focus'](#)⁴

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3.2 Abiy Ahmed's agenda and early actions

3.2.1 Home Office officials conducted the Fact-Finding Mission (HO FFM) to Ethiopia between 16 September and 20 September 2019. Most sources interviewed by the HO FFM team agreed that since Abiy Ahmed became

¹ USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (Executive Summary), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

² The Washington Post, 'Ethiopia's prime minister resigns amid political turmoil', 15 February 2018, [url](#)

³ BBC, 'Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister', 14 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴ Congressional Research Service, 'In Focus', 27 November 2018, [url](#)

prime minister in April 2018 there had been an opening up of the political space which had improved in comparison to the past^{5 6 7 8 9 10 11}.

3.2.2 A number of sources interviewed by the HO FFM team noted this had been manifest in positive aspects of the first phase of the reform process which included: the release of political prisoners, the return of exiled political groups, legal reform, increased political and media freedom, and freedom of expression, rapprochement with Eritrea and high-profile appointments in democratic institutions^{12 13 14 15 16}.

3.2.3 The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) noted in 'Change and Continuity in Protests and Political Violence in PM Abiy's Ethiopia', published 13 October 2018, covering trends since April 2018 that:

'The swearing in of Abiy Ahmed as Ethiopia's Prime Minister on April 2, 2018 has been regarded as a watershed moment in the country's political development; Abiy took power after his predecessor, Hailemariam Desalegn— who had been in office since 2012— unexpectedly left office. Hailemariam's time in office was marked by states of emergency and widespread protests. PM Abiy's brief tenure thus far has been marked by a dramatic shift in the country's rhetoric, an increased tolerance for political dissidents, and a thawing of tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea over a long-standing border dispute.'¹⁷

3.2.4 The Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in its September 2018 report 'Ethiopia Political situation and treatment of opposition' (DIS report 2018), based on interviews with a range of sources in Ethiopia noted: 'It was commonly agreed that the incoming Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had sharply broken with the policy of the past by reaching out to the opposition and shown signs of reformist policy' and '[t]he overall situation for opposition groups has improved following the nomination of Prime Minister Abiy, according to the majority of the interviewed sources [The report lists the following sources in the respective footnote: International researcher, national researcher, British Embassy, EU, Danish Refugee Council, the Fortune, blogger]'.¹⁸

3.2.5 The National Report submitted by the Federal Attorney General for Ethiopia to the Human Rights Council's working group for the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Ethiopia in February 2019 stated that: 'Since the deep-rooted political reforms began, large numbers of journalists, bloggers,

⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

¹⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

¹¹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

¹² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

¹³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

¹⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

¹⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

¹⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

¹⁷ ACLED, 'Change and Continuity...', 13 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸ DIS, 'DIS report 2018' (paras 2.2 and 5.1.1), September 2018, [url](#)

members and leaders of opposition or formerly banned political groups have been released from prison through pardon, dropping of charges and amnesty. Members and leadership of opposition political parties now have complete freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.¹⁹

- 3.2.6 The Fund for Peace in the Fragile States Index (FSI) Annual Report 2019, published 7 April 2019 (FSI report 2019) explained that the FSI is an annual ranking of 178 countries based on the different pressures they face that impact their levels of fragility. The 2019 FSI, comprised data collected between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2018²⁰ and noted:

‘After having ranked as the most-worsened country in the 2017 FSI, Ethiopia has staged a remarkable turn-around this year, ranking as the most-improved country [on the 2019 FSI] in the wake of the ambitious reform agenda of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed that has led to more political and social inclusiveness, breaking down the previous ethno-centric system that the country endured for decades.’²¹

- 3.2.7 The Amnesty International article, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’, dated 26 April 2019, noted: ‘Within months of his [Abiy’s] appointment, there was an opening of political space, many prisoners of conscience were released, cabinet was reshuffled and representation of women in government increased.’²²
- 3.2.8 Several sources interviewed by the HO FFM team noted that the opening-up of political rights included legal reform such as the passing of the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) law, drafting of the media law, revision of the Anti-terrorism Proclamation (ATP) and electoral law, and reform of the electoral board, justice system and courts^{23 24 25}.
- 3.2.9 The USSD report 2019 noted:
- ‘A number of positive changes in the human rights climate followed Abiy’s assumption of office. The government decriminalized political movements that past administrations had accused of treason, invited opposition leaders to return to the country and resume political activities, allowed peaceful rallies and demonstrations, enabled the formation and unfettered operation of new political parties and media outlets, continued steps to release thousands of political prisoners, and undertook revisions of repressive laws.’²⁶

For information on legal reform see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

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¹⁹ UN Human Rights Council, ‘National report’ (para 52), 25 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁰ The Fund for Peace, ‘FSI Annual Report 2019’ (p.33), 7 April 2019, [url](#)

²¹ The Fund for Peace, ‘FSI Annual Report 2019’ (p.11), 7 April 2019, [url](#)

²² Amnesty International, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’, 26 April 2019, [url](#).

²³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

²⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

²⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

²⁶ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (Executive Summary), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

3.3 State of emergency

- 3.3.1 The Ethiopian Constitution sets out the powers to declare a national state of emergency²⁷.
- 3.3.2 For information on the state of emergency declared in October 2016, see the [Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade](#) report on Ethiopia published in 2017.
- 3.3.3 The DIS report 2018 noted:
- ‘The majority of the interlocutors agreed that the State of Emergency, which had been imposed across Ethiopia in February 2018 had been implemented with “a softer hand” than the previous State of Emergency...
- ‘All of those interlocutors, who commented on the situation after the delegation had left Ethiopia, confirmed that the State of Emergency had been lifted [June 2018] and that this constituted a significant development...Whereas some observers noted that the lifting of the State of emergency could lead to an improvement in the human rights situation, the well informed diplomatic source representing the British Embassy called for caution by stating that the premature lifting of the State of Emergency did not per se have any clear impact (neither negative nor positive) on the current human rights situation, including for members of the opposition. A recurrent expression to describe the situation even before the State of Emergency was lifted was that of “cautious optimism” and hope.’²⁸
- 3.3.4 The UN Human Rights Council, in its Compilation on Ethiopia dated 1 March 2019 noted: ‘In June 2018, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that it was encouraged by the lifting of the state of emergency decree, three months ahead of its expiration date...’²⁹
- 3.3.5 For further information on the 2018 State of Emergency (SOE) see the [USSD report 2018](#) and the [DIS report 2018](#).
- 3.3.6 During the HO FFM in September 2019, several sources noted the existence of a military command post, or a de-facto state of emergency in some areas^{30 31 32 33 34 35}. DFID Ethiopia staff stated there was a military presence at the command posts, but it was not a violent situation³⁶. The Horn of Africa researcher stated: ‘No one really knows what is going on in the command posts, all that is very unclear at the moment.’³⁷ The OLF officers and Garoma B. Wakessa questioned the legality of the imposition of military

²⁷ Federal Republic of Ethiopia, ‘Constitution’ (undated) [url](#)

²⁸ DIS, ‘DIS report 2018’ (Section 2), September 2018, [url](#)

²⁹ UN Human Rights Council, ‘Compilation on Ethiopia’ (para 33), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

³⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

³¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

³² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

³³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

³⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

³⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

³⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

³⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

command posts due to the length of time they had been in place³⁸ or because they had not been brought through parliament³⁹.

3.3.7 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘On July 18, violence that erupted in Hawassa and the broader Sidama Zone following Sidama activists’ decision unilaterally to declare statehood resulted in dozens of deaths, ethnic identity-based attacks, destruction of property, and widespread robbery... Following this incident, regional authorities in the SNNP Region, where Sidama Zone is located, established a command post, which as of September [2019] remained active. The command post gave federal forces control over the security situation in the region.’⁴⁰

3.3.8 Ethiopia Insight an online organisation which focuses on publishing news analysis in ‘Preaching unity but flying solo, Abiy’s ambition may stall Ethiopia’s transition’ 25 February 2020 noted: ‘...parts of Oromia, the Southern region, parts of Amhara, and Benishangul-Gumuz are governed by a Command Post, in effect a kind of state of emergency under which the military have the controlling role. The same is the case along many inter-regional borders. It appears more than half of Ethiopian territory is de facto under the command of the federal army.’⁴¹

3.3.9 On 8 April 2020 the government declared a state of emergency in response to the coronavirus pandemic⁴². Al Jazeera noted:

“Because the coronavirus pandemic is getting worse, the Ethiopian government has decided to declare a state of emergency under Article 93 of the constitution,” Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said in a statement on Wednesday [8 April 2020].

“I call upon everybody to stand in line with government bodies and others that are trying to overcome this problem,” he added, warning of “grave legal measures” against anyone who undermines the fight against the pandemic.

‘It was not immediately clear how the state of emergency would affect day-to-day life in Ethiopia... It is the first state of emergency announced under Abiy, who came to power in 2018...

‘According to the country’s constitution, under a state of emergency, the Council of Ministers has “all necessary power to protect the country’s peace and sovereignty” and can suspend some “political and democratic rights”. The constitution also says legislators need to approve a state of emergency, which can last for six months and be extended every four months after that.

“One of the things that the state of emergency does is to give the federal government more authority and ability to work in coordination with regional governments, including their security apparatus,” [William] Davison [International Crisis Group] said.’⁴³

³⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

³⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁴⁰ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (section 1.a), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹ Ethiopia Insight in ‘Preaching unity but flying solo, ...’ 25 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴² Al Jazeera, ‘Ethiopia declares state of emergency to fight coronavirus, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴³ Al Jazeera, ‘Ethiopia declares state of emergency to fight coronavirus, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

- 3.3.10 International Crisis Group noted in April 2020: ‘... parliament approved a five-month state of emergency, giving authorities sweeping powers to battle the disease.’⁴⁴

For more information on military command posts see [Home Office fact finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation.](#)

See also [Treatment of opposition groups](#) and [Protests](#) below.

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3.4 Release of prisoners

- 3.4.1 The UN Human Rights Council noted the release of ‘a number’ of political detainees in May 2018⁴⁵ whilst Freedom House noted in July 2018 amnesty for ‘... thousands of individuals charged with treason and other crimes against the state, most of whom had been released earlier in the year.’⁴⁶ Both the USSD report 2018 and the UN Human Rights Council noted the government stated it was part of widening the political space^{47 48}.

- 3.4.2 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘In response to Prime Minister Abiy’s request to release political prisoners, parliament passed an amnesty law that lasted from July 20, 2018, until January 21[2019]. The federal attorney general reported 13,200 persons benefited from the amnesty law. The law granted amnesty for individuals and groups under police investigation, pending trial, or convicted of political crimes including treason, outrage against the constitutional order, and armed struggle. Individuals convicted of genocide, extrajudicial killings, forced abduction, and committing torture were not eligible for amnesty.’⁴⁹

- 3.4.3 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘Prime Minister Abiy had soon after his nomination announced the release of people who had been arbitrarily detained in prison. The majority of the interlocutors confirmed that an unspecified number – but at least several thousands and up to 10,000 according to Amnesty International – had been released from prison after Prime Minister Abiy’s entry into office. The released include journalists, human rights activists and prominent politicians. The EU source estimated the number of people being detained to approximately 30,000 out of which approximately 10,000 had been released by the new administration. The US Embassy emphasised that the new administration had still not lived up to its promise of liberating all political prisoners and opposition leaders and the national researcher explained that a number of detainees had simply “been forgotten” and remained in prison...

‘The EU representative underlined the contradictory elements of the new situation: whereas 10,000 of political prisoners had been released, others were still arrested by the police on political grounds. As another example, the

⁴⁴ ICG, ‘Coronavirus: Ethiopia’s opportunity to reboot its troubled transition’, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵ UN Human Rights Council, ‘Compilation on Ethiopia’ (para 33), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

⁴⁶ Freedom House, ‘Freedom House report 2019’ (section B), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁷ USSD, ‘USSD report 2018’ (1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁸ UN Human Rights Council, ‘Compilation on Ethiopia’ (para 33), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

⁴⁹ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (section 1.e), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

source referred to an incident where one opposition leader was released from prison and was going to address his people in his home town. He was subsequently detained by the federal police, who stated that he was not allowed to address his people. However, the regional police did not agree with the federal position, which resulted in a stand-off between federal and regional police.⁵⁰

- 3.4.4 An Africanews report, 'Ethiopia pardons over 13,000 political prisoners', dated 23 January 2019, stated:

'Ethiopia's determination to reform has seen up to 13,000 people who were previously charged with or convicted of terrorism and/or treason, pardoned over the past six months, state media said.

'Parliament in July passed a law allowing people convicted or facing charges of "treason, crime against the constitutional order and armed struggle" to apply for pardons. "More than [13,200] individuals took advantage of the law in the past six months," state-affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporate said on Tuesday, citing Ethiopia's attorney general.

'The previous government had said around 30,000 people including students, opposition leaders, journalists and bloggers were in detention following widespread protests that broke out in 2015...'⁵¹

- 3.4.5 In the HO FFM report, citing Garoma B Wakessa, Director General of Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA) and the Horn of Africa researcher, noted 'A lot has changed since Abiy has come into power ... Abiy has since released 60,000+ prisoners, most of them are political prisoners. This a big change in government tactics and we accepted these and are happy.'⁵² Similarly, the Horn of Africa researcher noted that '[f]rom April 2018 – April/May 2019... thousands of political detainees [were] released.'⁵³

- 3.4.6 Senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted to the FFT in September 2019 that the release of political prisoners had been 'a very good leap in the right direction.'⁵⁴

- 3.4.7 In the same HO FFM report the Department for International Development (DFID) Ethiopia noted:

"[we] [c]an't say there aren't any remaining political prisoners. If you ask the government they will say no political prisoners are being held, but the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] will say different." The source 'acknowledged the difficulty in defining a 'political prisoner', indicating that some people detained may not be political prisoners but are "painted" that way. However, most have been released and certainly the "major" ones. The source observed that some people get released but DFID did not know

⁵⁰ DIS, 'DIS report 2018' (section 4.1, 4.3), September 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹ Africanews, 'Ethiopia pardons over 13,000 political prisoners', 23 January 2019, [url](#).

⁵² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁵³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

about it, and the number actually released may be lower than the official number of released political prisoners.’⁵⁵

- 3.4.8 DFID Ethiopia staff noted re-arrests of released political prisoners at the time of the assassinations in June 2019 and that, due to re-arrest, the number of those released figures can be unclear⁵⁶.

- 3.4.9 In the HO FFM report the Ambo University lecturers noted the release applied to various types of prisoners: ‘Political prisoners were released from different prison camps including prominent opposition leaders, journalists, individuals involved in the political unrest. This was a critical change for Ethiopia.’⁵⁷

For details of individuals released see [Treatment of opposition groups](#) and [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#), and [Ginbot 7 \(G7\)/Arbegnoch \(Patriot\) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement \(AGUDM\)/Patriotic Ginbot 7 \(PG7\)](#)

For information on conditions of release [see Report of a Home Office Fact-Finding Mission Ethiopia: The political situation](#)

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3.5 Accountability for past torture/corruption

- 3.5.1 The Amnesty International article, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’, dated 26 April 2019 stated ‘Importantly, over 60 high level government officials got arrested on charges of torture and corruption by the end of 2018, and Ethiopia’s Legal Advisory Council announced the redrafting of some of the more draconian pieces of legislation as a part of judicial reforms.’⁵⁸

- 3.5.2 In the HO FFM report of the mission in September 2019, the Horn of Africa Researcher observed that 60 high level government officials were arrested on charges of torture and corruption in 2018 but did not believe there had been much progress in these cases⁵⁹. The senior representative of OFC stated that the arrests and charges cited in the Amnesty report, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’ of April 2019⁶⁰, related to middle and lower level corruption. The source opined that the ‘[l]evel of accountability and acceptance of the government is shrinking.’⁶¹

- 3.5.3 In the same HO FFM report DFID Ethiopia staff noted:
‘There are many people who have been arrested for committing torture in prison, for example prison administrators have been charged. When working with human rights, the violation of them is very broad. In a way it is a systematic problem. The government have not only supported it but enabled it for example, torture, enforced disappearance.

⁵⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁵⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Amnesty International, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’, 26 April 2019, [url](#).

⁵⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Amnesty International, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’, 26 April 2019, [url](#)

⁶¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

‘Accountability has not been depoliticised, there has been some accountability given for human right violations but not to the level that we expected... there are still areas where the government need to commit more to.’⁶²

3.5.4 Senior representatives from E-ZEMA told the UK FFT in September 2019:

‘There are some cases of corruption, in the whole process we are at the stage of people being charged (with legal documents to prove this) and they are going through the courts. Of course this shows commitment to security and justice reform...’ In relation to judicial process, the Life and Peace Institute stated there was ‘excitement’ when high profile people were arrested and charged, but the court process is very long. The court cases should be heard faster, more rigorously and impartially⁶³.

3.5.5 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘The government took steps to prosecute selected members of senior leadership for human rights abuses but decided on a policy of forgiveness for lower-level officials under its broader reconciliation efforts. The government took positive steps toward greater accountability under Abiy to change the relationship between security forces and the population. In August 2018 the federal attorney general filed criminal charges against former Somali regional president Abdi Mohammed Omar and several others relating to criminal conspiracy and armed uprising. The federal attorney general brought charges related to egregious human rights violations and corruption against Getachew Assefa, Assefa Belay, Shishay Leoul, and Atsbaha Gidey, all former officials in the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). On July 16 [2019], the Federal High Court ordered the trial to proceed in the absence of the defendants after police were unable to locate the men in the Tigray Region.’⁶⁴

3.5.6 Human Rights Watch (HRW) in the ‘World Report 2020 – Ethiopia’ covering events of 2019 (HRW report 2020), published 14 January 2020:

‘Beyond the arrests of some high-level officials in November 2018, there has been little progress on accountability for past abuses. A national reconciliation commission was set up in December 2018 but it has an unclear mandate. In Ethiopia’s Somali region, some of those who ran the region’s notorious Jail Ogaden, where torture, rape and death were common, have been sentenced for abuses committed under their command; public information on these trials was lacking.’⁶⁵

See also [House of Commons Library ‘Ethiopia charts a new course under Abiy Ahmed – but challenges remain’](#)⁶⁶

For more information on the political landscape and accountability for past torture and corruption see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

⁶² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁶³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

⁶⁴ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (Executive Summary), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁵ HRW, ‘World Report 2020 – Ethiopia’ (Arbitrary arrest), 14 January 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁶ House of Commons Library, ‘Ethiopia charts a new course under Abiy ...’, 26 September 2018, [url](#)

See also [Treatment of opposition groups](#)

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3.6 Designated terrorist organisations

3.6.1 Five groups were designated by the Ethiopian parliament as terrorist organisations in 2011:

- Patriotic Ginbot-7
- the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)
- the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)
- al-Qa'ida
- Al Shabaab⁶⁷

3.6.2 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Country Information Report – Ethiopia (The DFAT report 2017) noted, ‘Armed opposition groups, including the ONLF and the OLF, have...been accused of carrying out abuses and violent attacks on government forces and civilians.’⁶⁸

3.6.3 Fitsum Arega, the Ethiopian prime minister’s chief of staff announced on Twitter on 30 June 2018:

‘Pursuant to Proc. 652/2009, Cabinet has submitted a resolution to Parliament for ratification that will rescind the designation of OLF, ONLF & Ginbot 7 as terrorist groups. The decision will encourage groups to use peaceful political discourse to achieve political ends.’⁶⁹

‘As part of reconciliation Cabinet has approved an Amnesty Law to be sent to Parliament that grants amnesty for individuals & groups, either under investigation or convicted on treason, crime against the Const’l order, armed struggle. Details & conditions are in the law.’⁷⁰

3.6.4 A number of sources noted the removal of Ginbot 7, OLF, and the ONLF from Ethiopia’s list of proscribed terrorist organisations in June 2018^{71 72 73}. Members of these groups subsequently returned to Ethiopia from exile^{74 75}.

3.6.5 Additionally, several sources interviewed by the FFM team observed that the opening of the political space included the return of exiled groups and opposition forces^{76 77 78}. The Ambo University lecturers observed that those that returned to Ethiopia included the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Sidama Liberation Front, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), Gambella

⁶⁷ USSD, ‘Country Reports on Terrorism 2016’ (African overview), 19 July 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁸ DFAT, ‘DFAT report 2017’ (para 3.31), 28 September 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁹ Twitter, ‘Fitsum Arega’, 30 June 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Twitter, ‘Fitsum Arega’, 30 June 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹ Freedom House, ‘Freedom House report 2019’, (section B), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

⁷² HRW, ‘HRW report 2019’ (introduction), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷³ Amnesty International, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’, 26 April 2019, [url](#).

⁷⁴ USSD, ‘USSD report 2018’ (section 3), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵ HRW, ‘HRW report 2019’ (introduction), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

⁷⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

Liberation Front, Afar Liberation Front, prominent human rights activists, artists and scholars⁷⁹.

3.6.6 The DIS report 2018 noted, in its executive summary:

'The opposition groups OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 had been removed from the national list of terrorist organisations and their leadership had been invited to return to participate in political discussions. OLF and Ginbot 7 leaders had accepted the invitation and returned to Ethiopia. Both the OLF and the ONLF had been weakened over the past three years and lost political and military influence...

'According to the British Embassy, it is indicative of a new political climate that the Prime Minister, in addition to having lifted terrorism charges against opposition groups, also has invited them to return to Ethiopia to participate in political discussions'⁸⁰

3.6.7 Al Jazeera in its article Thousands of Ethiopians hail return of once-banned Oromo group, dated 15 September 2018 stated:

'Hundreds of thousands of people have gathered in the capital of Ethiopia to welcome leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the latest members of a formerly-banned rebel group to return home following a string of political reforms in the country.

'The jubilant crowd waving OLF flags gathered at Addis Ababa's Meskel Square on Saturday, where a large concert was held to welcome the group's leader Dawud Ibsa and others, while similar events were held in Ethiopia's Oromia region...'⁸¹

3.6.8 The HO FFM team interviewed Hassan Moalin, ONLF who stated that the ONLF signed a deal with the government on 21 October 2018 and on the 1 December 2018, they were welcomed back to Addis Ababa. The same source noted: 'When Abiy came to power in 2018, he opened a political space for us all. We believed it was a miracle when he delisted us as terrorists in parliament and said they were struggling for their right and the government was committing a crime against humanity.'⁸²

3.6.9 See also [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#), [Ogaden National Liberation Front \(ONLF\)](#) and [Ginbot 7 \(G7\)/Arbegnoch \(Patriot\) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement \(AGUDM\)/Patriotic Ginbot 7 \(PG7\)](#) and [Treatment of opposition groups](#)

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3.7 Assassinations and attempted coup: June 2019

3.7.1 The BBC stated that on 22 June 2019, in Bahir Dar the capital of Amhara, regional governor Ambachew Mekonnen was killed along with an adviser. A few hours later in Addis Ababa the chief of staff of the Ethiopian army,

⁷⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁸⁰ DIS, 'DIS report 2018' (Executive Summary and para 5.1.1.), September 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹ Al Jazeera, 'Thousands of Ethiopians hail return...', 15 September 2018, [url](#)

⁸² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

General Seare Mekonnen, was shot dead alongside another officer, reportedly whilst trying to prevent a coup⁸³.

- 3.7.2 Foreign Policy, a global affairs media organisation, in its article entitled 'Ethiopia Is at a 'Very Critical Juncture'' published on 24 June 2019 noted that there was confusion about the nature and planning of the assassinations⁸⁴. The same article, in analysis provided by Human Rights Watch (HRW), noted:

'Under Abiy's leadership there's been a lot of very positive human rights reforms, but one of the ongoing concerns has been the breakdown in security across wide parts of the country. And I think so far that insecurity has manifested itself in a lot of ethnic violence....Over this weekend, we saw a slightly different manifestation of that breakdown. While Abiy has earned a lot of praise for his human rights reforms, I think it's clear that some of those actors that are not supportive of the regime have made their mark.'⁸⁵

- 3.7.3 Reporting on the same incidents, France 24, a French state-owned international news and current affairs television network, in the article 'Dozens killed in foiled Ethiopia coup attempt, authorities say' dated 26 June 2019 noted:

'Dozens of people were killed in fighting during a foiled coup by a rogue state militia in Ethiopia's Amhara region at the weekend, the regional government spokesman said.., the first official report of significant clashes.

'The militia attacked the police headquarters, ruling party headquarters and president's office where they executed three top officials in Amhara's regional capital of Bahir Dar on Saturday...

'The militia was a recently formed unit of the region's security services...The fact that the militia were state forces rather than independent raises the stakes for the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who has rolled out a package of economic and political reforms since taking office in April last year.

'He has lifted a ban on political parties, released journalists, rebels and prisoners, and prosecuted officials accused of abuses. But his shake-up of the military and intelligence services has earned him powerful enemies.

'His government is also struggling to contain discontent from Ethiopia's myriad ethnic groups fighting the federal government and each other for greater influence and resources. [...]

'Men in camouflage uniforms killed more than 50 people and injured 23 others in the Metakal zone of the Benishangul-Gumuz region.'⁸⁶

- 3.7.4 Voice of America (VOA), the US state funded international news agency, in the article 'Assassinations, Arrests Test Ethiopia's Fragile Push Toward Democracy', 5 July 2019 stated:

⁸³ BBC, 'Ethiopia army chief shot dead in 'coup bid' attacks', 23 June 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁴ Foreign Policy, 'Ethiopia Is at a 'Very Critical Juncture'', 24 June 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Foreign Policy, 'Ethiopia Is at a 'Very Critical Juncture'', 24 June 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁶ France 24, 'Dozens killed in foiled Ethiopia coup attempt,...' 26 June 2019, [url](#)

‘The attacks [22 June 2019], Abiy said, are only the latest attempt to disrupt his agenda through violence, the most recent in a chain of incidents that, together, constitute an existential threat to [Ethiopia]....

‘He characterized instigators of violence as illogical and heartless. But William Davison, International Crisis Group’s senior analyst for Ethiopia, told VOA Brigadier General Asaminew Tsige, who government officials say masterminded the attacks, and who soon after died in a firefight with federal security forces, was a popular figure in the Amhara region...In his remarks Monday, Abiy hinted at other, unreported attempts to grab power through violence since he took office...

‘Abiy enjoys widespread support, both at home, toward the middle of the Ethiopian political spectrum, and within the international community, Henok G. Gabisa, a professor of practice at Washington and Lee University’s School of Law, in Virginia, told VOA. Religious leaders and civic society groups share Abiy’s vision, Gabisa added.

‘But some say Abiy’s reforms don’t go far enough and fear that mass arrests and internet shutdowns signal a backslide on promises to open space for opposition groups and competing political parties. The government arrested hundreds following last month’s attacks. And the internet shutoff is just the latest attempt to control the flow of information...

‘Some Ethiopians, especially those who feel left out of reforms and on the margins of the country’s political sphere, share Abiy’s commitment to the country’s unique brand of ethnic federalism, a tenuous agglomeration of some of the country’s more than 80 ethnic groups. That ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, dominates the political space, but may be on its last legs.

“The political elites within the EPRDF are divided, and they have yet to learn to work together during such an experimental time,” Gabisa said. “I think Abiy is the last and remaining chance for the EPRDF to repair itself,” he added.’⁸⁷

For information on the government’s reaction to the attempted coup and assassinations, including arrests see [State reaction to assassinations and attempted coup](#). For more information on the effect on individual groups see [National Movement of Amhara \(NaMA\)](#) and [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ/E-ZEMA\)](#),

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3.8 Change of pace in reform process in 2019/2020

- 3.8.1 The HO FFM team interviewed a number of sources in September 2019 about the reforms introduced by Prime Minister Abiy. Sources, in general, considered that the pace of reform had slowed. The Horn of Africa researcher in the HO FFM report considered it ‘...a period of flux. Transition’ suggesting there had been a slowdown in terms of reform⁸⁸. A number of

⁸⁷ VOA, ‘Assassinations, Arrests Test Ethiopia’s Fragile Push Toward Democracy’, 5 July 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

sources thought that after the initial positive changes, the situation in 2019 was now one of regression or backsliding^{89 90 91}.

- 3.8.2 In the HO FFM report of the September 2019 FFM the senior representatives of E-ZEMA thought that there was a gap between the government's willingness to democratise and its capacity to do so⁹². William Davidson considered that there was not a strong functioning government to advance the reforms and stated 'Any ruling government and governing system faces difficulties in making an announcement at the top and then implementing them properly. Ethiopia is no exception. While there are many democratic reforms being advanced it does not have a strong functioning government to implement them. Local grievances are being played out at regional levels as a response to the widening of the political space, and tensions will take a while to fade away.'⁹³
- 3.8.3 In interviews with the HO FFM team in September 2019, the Life and Peace Institute acknowledged that the 'reforms are complex and will take time'⁹⁴ whilst the Ambo University lecturers noted '[t]here are still people close to the centre of the government who believe Abiy and in this reformation period... The president is representing over 80 ethnicities/nationalities, there needs to be more time given to him and the government to make the necessary changes.'⁹⁵ Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted the (large) scale of the task facing Abiy in redefining politics and practice in Ethiopia⁹⁶ and the senior representative of OFC noted 'Different areas of society are organising public meetings where people are asking where is the change that was promised? It is these people who are not enjoying the change and frustration is rising.'⁹⁷
- 3.8.4 The Life and Peace Institute also told the HO FFM team that there were political groups seeking to hinder the transitional process⁹⁸. While the senior representatives of E-ZEMA similarly noted the challenges informal groups (who do not act in accordance with the law) posed for both the political opposition and the government in achieving change. The same source stated that political groups needed to be more rational and patient in the transition period⁹⁹.
- 3.8.5 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University noted: 'The state is not against him [Abiy], but we are in a dangerous place within the transitional period. We are unsure whether the state can complete the reforms or whether it will collapse. This is a serious danger for Abiy. There is an opportunity to mobilise forces based on ethnic nationality.' The same source

⁸⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

⁹⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁹¹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁹² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

⁹³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

⁹⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

also observed: 'Abiy's own party is not willing to support the reformation process, we have a situation here in Ethiopia where there are people who have their own political agendas with different focuses such as the economy and education reforms.'¹⁰⁰

- 3.8.6 The Freedom House report 2020, covering events in 2019, repeating its assessment from the 2019 report¹⁰¹ noted: 'Abiy's administration has pledged reforms that will ease the legal and practical requirements for parties to operate, though substantial changes are necessary before political parties can carry out activities freely.'¹⁰²
- 3.8.7 The Freedom House report 2020 added, with regards to the Score Change for political pluralism and participation: The score improved from 1 to 2 [out of 4, 0 being the least free] because a number of political groups were removed from lists that designated them as terrorist organizations, and they were permitted to operate during the year.'¹⁰³ An improvement on the assessment from the 2019 report which had a score change of 0 to 1¹⁰⁴.
- 3.8.8 The HRW report 2020 noted: 'Human rights reforms implemented by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed during his first year in office were threatened in 2019 by communal, including ethnic, conflict and breakdowns in law and order.'¹⁰⁵
- 3.8.9 Amnesty International (AI), in 'Beyond Law Enforcement Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara And Oromia', published 29 May 2020 (AI May 2020 report) noted 'While initial first steps have been taken towards improving the human rights environment in the country, a persistence of old-style patterns of violence perpetrated by the security forces threatens to derail sustained long-term gains.'¹⁰⁶

See also [Freedom of expression and assembly](#)

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3.9 Reform to the electoral process and scheduled elections in 2020

- 3.9.1 The USSD report 2019 repeated its assessment from previous years^{107 108 109 110} that 'The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The ruling party's electoral advantages, however, limited this ability.'¹¹¹
- 3.9.2 The National Report submitted by the Federal Attorney General for Ethiopia to the Human Rights Council's working group for the UN's Universal Periodic Review of Ethiopia dated February 2019 stated that:

¹⁰⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Freedom House, 'Freedom House report 2019' (section B.2), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰² Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia' (Key Developments...), 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia' (Key Developments...), 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Freedom House, 'Freedom House report 2019' (section B.2), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ HRW, 'World Report 2020 – Ethiopia', 14 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ AI, 'Beyond Law Enforcement... (Executive summary), 29 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ USSD, 'USSD report 2016' (section 3), 3 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ USSD, 'USSD report 2015' (section 3), 13 April 2016, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ USSD, 'USSD report 2017' (section 3), 20 April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ USSD, 'USSD report 2018' (section 3), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹ USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (section 3), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

'The current national electoral laws are being amended through consultations between the ruling and opposition parties. The revised laws are expected to shift Ethiopia's electoral system from first-past-the-post to a mix between proportional and first-past-the-post systems and redefine the composition and functions of the National Electoral Board thereby opening up opportunities for diverse voices to join the national parliament. The ongoing revision of the media law, the charities and societies legislation and the electoral laws will create more room for civil society engagement in civic and voter education as well as election monitoring and improve public and commercial media access to opposition political parties to ensure more inclusive electoral debates.

'To enhance the independence and credibility of the National Electoral board, a new Chairperson has been sworn in by the House of People's Representatives after consultation with opposition political parties. The Board's new leadership is taking a series of measures to enhance its capacity to hold free and fair national elections in 2020 and beyond.'¹¹²

- 3.9.3 In the HO FFM report which interviewed sources 16-20 September 2019, the legal executive and the Ambo University lecturers noted that the voting system in Ethiopia continued to be the 'first past the post' system despite calls to reform this to proportional representation^{113 114}.

- 3.9.4 In a January 2019 article summarising political events in Ethiopia in 2018, the Addis Standard (a privately-owned Ethiopian news website) stated:

'...on November 22 [2018] Parliament convenes for yet another historic session and approves Birtukan Mideksa, a former opposition leader and political prisoner, to chair the Ethiopian National Electoral Board (ENEB)...

'Before November comes to an end, representatives from 81 opposition parties meet PM Abiy in his office and discussed among other, the highly anticipated general elections in 2020.'¹¹⁵

- 3.9.5 International Crisis Group (ICG) in its report 'Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition', published 21 February 2019 noted:

'Changes during Abiy's first months in office have been fast-paced.... He has assembled a media-savvy team to disseminate an inclusive message, condemning the EPRDF's past abuses and promising free and fair elections and a more legitimate and inclusive political system.

'...With the 2020 elections fast approaching (and local elections due in mid-2019), the administration has precious little time to prepare, and the same is true of a raft of political parties that have never before had the opportunity to participate in a credible election... Abiy should reach out to the opposition to agree on a dispute resolution framework ahead of the vote. This step might minimise the temptation of those unhappy with the outcome to resort to violence.'¹¹⁶

¹¹² UN Human Rights Council, 'National report ' (para 62-63), 25 February 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ Addis Standard, '2018: From nervous January to historic July...', 2 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ ICG, 'Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition' (Executive Summary), 21 February 2019, [url](#)

- 3.9.6 In the HO FFM report reporting on the mission of September 2019 that the Horn of Africa researcher noted that practically, not many groups were formalising or developing a presence throughout the country. The source opined that rather than official governmental barriers, it was due the lack of political culture amongst groups who, due to the past political climate had little previous experience in how to function¹¹⁷.
- 3.9.7 The UN Human Rights Council's Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Ethiopia, dated 4 March 2019, in a joint response from Transparency Ethiopia and the Consortium of Ethiopian Rights Organizations noted: '...recent reforms of the electoral system could improve the fairness of the electoral system and increase the participation of different political parties and their representation in the national parliament.... almost all exiled political parties had been invited to participate in the democratic process and the elections in 2020.'¹¹⁸
- 3.9.8 Africanews, an independent news organisation, in their report dated 15 March 2019, stated:
- 'Competing political parties in Ethiopia on Thursday [14 March 2019] signed a peace pact as part of democratic efforts as the country gears towards crucial polls slated for 2020. Reports indicate that over 100 parties were signatories to the code of conduct document at an event held in the capital Addis Ababa.
- 'Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed the document on behalf of the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF. He described the occasion as a democratic milestone.
- "Describing the day as a historic and unique one that has bound more than 100 parties in common understanding, he called upon all to treat the document as one that guides the actions of all. He also called upon law and security enforcement entities to serve all parties equally. In concluding, PM Abiy Ahmed called upon all to be custodians of peace and unity in our current moment," the PM's office said in social media posts....
- 'Abiy has in the past held talks with opposition parties and spoken about his determination to ensure the polls are free, fair and credible. He has stated explicitly that he will respect the will of the people after the vote.'¹¹⁹
- 3.9.9 William Davison considered that the widening of political space for electoral competition had meant there was increased dynamism from the opposition, increased levels of political activity and more vibrant Ethiopian politics¹²⁰.
- 3.9.10 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, when interviewed by the UK FFT stated that the new electoral board [NEBE] under Abiy was good, whilst acknowledging that the organisation still had capacity issues¹²¹. One of the

¹¹⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, 'Summary of Stakeholders' submissions...' (para 39), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Africanews, 'Ethiopia parties sign pact ahead of 2020 polls', 15 March 2019, [url](#).

¹²⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

¹²¹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

NaMA leaders noted the employment of ‘brilliant people’ in the NEBE gave them hope for a credible election¹²².

3.9.11 Representatives of E-ZEMA and Hassan Moalin, ONLF told the HO FFM team in September 2019 that they anticipated increased focus and attention on political opposition groups during the election period^{123 124}. The OLF officers stated they did not expect the election to be free, fair and credible but were preparing nonetheless¹²⁵.

3.9.12 Ethiopia’s parliament passed a new election law on Saturday 24 August 2019¹²⁶. For information provided about the law by sources interviewed by the FFT see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

3.9.13 The Freedom House report 2020 noted:

‘The EPRDF still maintains numerous formal and informal advantages over opposition parties, and there are no opposition parties represented in Parliament. However, the changes Prime Minister Abiy’s government began to implement in 2018 improved conditions for opposition groupings, which may now prepare more openly for the 2020 parliamentary elections. Abiy in August 2018 expressed a commitment to democratic polls, and pledged that he would not allow his reforms to delay the vote. The government’s willingness to facilitate a November 2019 referendum on the future status of the Sidama zone and accept its outcome can be seen as initial evidence of a new tolerance of opposition activity. (The zone saw an overwhelming majority voting in favor of statehood for their region, and at least 10 other zones have made similar requests.)

‘The new electoral law passed in August 2019 also exemplifies the government’s rhetorical commitment towards inclusive multiparty elections. Since several regions—Tigray, Oromia, and Somali in particular—now have well-organized opposition parties with a history of popular support, the opposition camp stands a better chance than in previous elections to curb the ruling party’s complete hold on power.’¹²⁷

3.9.14 Two sources interviewed during the HO FFM noted elections were due in May 2020 and were likely to be contested, with the potential for tension to rise in the country^{128 129}.

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¹²² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

¹²³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Hassan Moalin, ONLF [url](#)

¹²⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – OLF officers [url](#)

¹²⁶ The Africa Report, ‘Ethiopia passes new laws ahead of 2020 elections’ 29 August 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁷ Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia’ (section B2) 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

¹²⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Political section, British Embassy [url](#)

3.10 COVID-19 and postponement of elections in 2020

3.10.1 Since the HO FFM team's meeting with sources in September 2019, the electoral board announced a date for elections to be held on 29 August 2020¹³⁰.

3.10.2 However, on 31 March 2020 the electoral board announced Ethiopia would postpone the general elections in August (with no new date announced) because of the coronavirus outbreak¹³¹.

3.10.3 The Economist in 'Ethiopia is entering constitutional limbo', 16 May 2020 noted:

'...with the polls postponed indefinitely by covid-19, Ethiopia is approaching a constitutional crisis. By law Ethiopia's parliament will reach the end of its constitutional five-year term on October 5th. That could leave the country without a legitimate parliament or government.

The delay has prompted a backlash from opposition leaders. Many of them had suspected long before the outbreak of covid-19 that Abiy's Prosperity Party would try to rig or postpone the elections...

To avert a showdown the government has asked the Council of Constitutional Inquiry for an opinion on the postponement. But this is not an independent constitutional court. The council is merely an advisory body to the upper house of parliament, which is controlled by the ruling party, notes Zemelak Ayele of Ethiopia's Centre for Federal Studies.

Although the constitution does not spell out the circumstances under which an election may be postponed, it still provides a "framework" allowing it, says Adem K Abebe, an expert based in The Hague. But such legal subtleties may count for little without the support of opposition leaders....

Abiy has met his opponents once to discuss the constitutional impasse. But he has dismissed calls for an interim government and warned that "illegal elections" will "harm the country and the people".¹³²

3.10.4 On 4 May 2020 co-signing members of the Alliance for Democratic Federalism: Oromo Liberation Front, Ogaden National Liberation Front, Oromo Federalist Congress, Agaw National Congress, Mocha Democratic Party, Kaffa Green Party, Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty issued a statement on the government's proposals for when the constitution mandate ends on 10 October 2020. See [Ethiopia Insight](#) for the verbatim statement¹³³.

See also [Political landscape](#) and [Treatment of opposition groups](#)

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¹³⁰ Al Jazeera, 'Ethiopia parliamentary election: Poll announced for August 29', 14 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³¹ Bloomberg, 'Ethiopia Postpones General Elections Because of Coronavirus', 31 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³² The Economist, 'Ethiopia is entering constitutional limbo', 16 May 2020, [url](#)

¹³³ Ethiopia Insight, 'Opposition parties statement on election postponement', 4 May 2020, [url](#)

3.11 Ruling party – Prosperity Party (formerly Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front)

3.11.1 The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was comprised of 4 parties: the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM), and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)¹³⁴.

3.11.2 However, in November 2019 Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed established a new party, the Prosperity Party which brought together 3 of the parties from the former EPRDF coalition and 5 smaller parties¹³⁵. In December 2019 the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) registered the Prosperity Party. The parties that dissolved and merged to form the new party were:

- Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP)
- Benishangul-Gumuz Democratic Party (BDP)
- Oromo Democratic Party (ODP)
- Amhara Democratic Party (ADP)
- Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM)
- Somali Democratic Party
- Gambela Peoples Democratic Movement (GPDM)
- Harari National League (HNL)¹³⁶

3.11.3 The TPLF, the dominant member of the EPRDF coalition, did not join the Prosperity Party¹³⁷.

3.11.4 Freedom House, in its 'Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia' report (Freedom House 2020 report) covering events of 2019 noted:

'In November, a major reorganization of the ruling-party coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), saw three of its four main members (as well as several affiliates) approve a merger into a new unitary platform, the Prosperity Party. The Tigrayan People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (TPLF), the original core of the EPRDF coalition, was the only member organization to oppose the merger. This development, officially recognized by the electoral board in December, marked a major shift away from an ethnic-based to a pan-Ethiopian political organization.'¹³⁸

3.11.5 The Ethiopia Insight article 'Preaching unity but flying solo, Abiy's ambition may stall Ethiopia's transition' published 25 February 2020, explained that:

'Ethnicity was the foundation of the previously dominant political parties, both inside and outside the EPRDF. Prosperity Party is being structured along a clear political divide, endorsing some main trends of the

¹³⁴ Addis Standard, 'Dr. Abiy Ahmed elected new chairman of EPRDF', 27 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵ Borkena, 'Ethiopia's election board recognized Prosperity Party', 25 December 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶ Al Jazeera, 'Why Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party is good news for Ethiopia', 18 December 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷ Al Jazeera, 'Why Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party is good news for Ethiopia', 18 December 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁸ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia' (Key Developments...), 4 March 2020, [url](#)

‘Ethiopianist’ political current, which had been largely silenced since the beginning of the 1990s. It is aimed particularly at the country’s ethnically mixed cities. Membership is not based on ethnicity—anybody can join whatever his ethnicity and residence, while under EPRDF’s rule one could join only the party of his ethnicity. In the leading organs, the representation of each ethnic group will not be equal as in the EPRDF but probably roughly proportionate to their population.’¹³⁹

- 3.11.6 ACLED in ‘Ten Conflicts to Worry About in 2020’, January 2020, citing an Al Jazeera article¹⁴⁰ noted that ‘While this was Abiy’s attempt at appealing toward a more unified national identity outside of his support base in Addis Ababa, opposition “federalists” largely supported by Ethiopia’s large rural populations feel that the merger forms the “structural foundation for a unitary state that will rob them off their [cultural] dignity and autonomy”’.¹⁴¹
- 3.11.7 On 4 February 2020 the NEBE announced its decision to officially dissolve the ERPDF¹⁴².

See also [Opposition parties](#)

For more information on the political system and background to the ERPDF see [Ethiopia: Background note](#)

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3.12 Opposition parties

- 3.12.1 For a list of political parties and their leaders see [Central Intelligence Agency \(CIA\) Factbook](#)¹⁴³
- 3.12.2 At the time of writing, no list of political parties registered for the 2020 election could be found amongst sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 3.12.3 However, about 107 political parties have signed a code of conduct with the prime minister ahead of the polls¹⁴⁴ and Anadolu Agency, a state run Turkish new agency, noted on 6 December 2019 that there were ‘...nearly 170 political parties registered to vie in coming general elections.’¹⁴⁵
- 3.12.4 BBC Monitoring noted on 7 December 2019:
- ‘Ten Ethiopian opposition political parties have agreed to work together, government-affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporate has reported [on 6 December 2019].
- ‘The ten political parties appended their signatures to join hands at a ceremony held in Addis Ababa on 6 December. The parties are: The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), Afar Peoples Liberation Party (APLP), Sidama Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM), Agew National Council (ANC), Kafa Green Party (KGP),

¹³⁹ Ethiopia Insight, ‘Preaching unity but flying solo...’, 25 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ Al Jazeera, ‘Why Abiy Ahmed’s Prosperity Party...’ 5 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ ACLED, ‘Ten Conflicts to Worry About in 2020’, January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴² Ethiopia Monitor, ‘NEBE Officially Dissolves EPRDF...’ 5 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³ CIA Fact book, ‘Government’, 15 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Ethiopian Embassy, ‘Ethiopia parties sign pact ahead of 2020 polls...’, 15 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ Anadolu Agency, ‘Ethiopia: Merger, election and popular apprehension’, 6 December 2019, [url](#)

Benishangul Gumuz People's Liberation Movement (BPLM), Kimant Democratic Party (KDP), Gambella Peoples Liberation Movement (GPLM) and Mocha Democratic Party (MDP).

'The main objectives of these parties are to join hand and form a coalition to compete against the newly formed Prosperity Party (PP) in the 2020 general elections.'¹⁴⁶

3.12.5 Reuters in 'Ethiopia's Tigray region eyes election in challenge to national unity', 5 May 2020 noted:

'Ethiopia's Tigray region plans to hold elections, its main party said, setting it on a collision course with the federal government and testing the country's fragile unity. The Tigray People's Liberation Front, the region's governing party, split acrimoniously from the national Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition last year when its three other parties merged to form the new Prosperity Party.

The TPLF said late on Monday it would proceed with elections in Tigray despite the nationwide postponement of voting. "We are making preparations including the holding of a regional election in order to safeguard the rights of our people from chaos," a TPLF statement said. It did not mention a date for the vote.

Ethiopia's National Elections Board said no request for a vote was submitted by TPLF and no organisation other than the NEBE had a mandate to conduct any type of election.'¹⁴⁷

3.12.6 The Institute for Security Studies (ISS), in 'Policy Brief' published in May 2020 noted:

'The TPLF, as the only semi-independent (of the PP) regional ruling party, is running its own state of emergency in Tigray. By further entrenching its tentacles across that killil (federal unit) and stepping up its capacity to mobilise, it can muster and exercise greater repressive and controlling power in the region. This leads to the conclusion that Tigray, along with other areas harboring parties that have strong connections with their social bases, will continue to remain an epicentre of opposition politics in the future.'¹⁴⁸

See also [Reform to the electoral process and scheduled elections in 2020, COVID-19 and postponement of elections in 2020](#) and [Ruling party – Prosperity Party \(formerly Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front\)](#)

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Section 4 updated: 23 March 2020

¹⁴⁶ BBC Monitoring, 'Ten Ethiopian opposition parties agree to work together', 7 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ Reuters, 'Ethiopia's Tigray region eyes election in challenge to national unity', 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ ISS, 'Policy Brief' (p.7), May 2020, [url](#)

4. Treatment of opposition groups

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 This section covers the treatment of opposition groups generally. For information on the treatment of specific groups see the relevant section under the named organisation.

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4.2 Discrimination and harassment

- 4.2.1 The UN Human Rights Council's Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Ethiopia dated 4 March 2019 in a submission from Cultural Survival, US noted '...surveillance of the general population had been conducted at the grassroots level and that EPRDF, had several informants and enforcers in the remote regions of the country. Surveillance had been conducted through a "one-to-five" system, where one party member had been assigned to monitor five people.'¹⁴⁹ The time frame and profile of those subject to surveillance was not noted in this report. The submission refers to the New York Times article from November 2017¹⁵⁰.
- 4.2.2 The USSD report 2019 noted: 'Upon taking office in April 2018, Prime Minister Abiy stated freedom of speech was essential to the country's future. NGOs subsequently reported that practices such as arrests, detention, abuse, and harassment of persons for criticizing the government dramatically diminished.'¹⁵¹
- 4.2.3 The same report noted that after the government allowed the return of exiled opposition groups in 2018 including OLF, ONLF and PG7: 'The parties that returned and newly formed parties continued to operate in the country. Some parties including the OLF, NaMA, the Tigrayan Alliance for National Democracy (TAND), and the OFC, reported they were unable to open or run offices in certain parts of the country due to instability as well as harassment, intimidation, and attacks on their members...
- 'Constituent parties of the EPRDF conferred advantages upon their members; the party directly owned many businesses and allegedly awarded jobs and business contracts to loyal supporters.
- 'Registered political parties must receive permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices, with at least one major opposition party reporting it was able to open many offices during the year in advance of the 2020 national election. Laws requiring parties to report "public meetings" and obtain permission for public rallies inhibited opposition activities. Opposition parties reported they rented offices and meeting halls in the Amhara and Oromia Regions without major difficulty.'¹⁵²
- 4.2.4 The same report noted: 'There were reports authorities dismissed opposition members from their jobs and that those not affiliated with the EPRDF

¹⁴⁹ UN Human Rights Council, 'Summary of Stakeholders' submissions...' (para 46), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ NY Times, 'We Are Everywhere': How Ethiopia Became a Land of Prying Eye', 5 Nov 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (section 2.a), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵² USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (section 3), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

sometimes had trouble receiving the “support letters” from their neighborhoods or wards necessary to obtain employment.’¹⁵³

- 4.2.5 In the HO FFM report of interviews conducted in September 2019, the Horn of Africa Researcher observed that: ‘[i]t [is] a complicated space to operate in. Not as it was in the past when it was primarily the central government who applied the pressure/restricted political space, now there are multiple actors. Some groups throughout the country are struggling to operate/set up offices due to local “trouble makers” or gangs. Some concerns about that and security and capacity at local level.’¹⁵⁴
- 4.2.6 In the same report, the Ambo University lecturers in relation to Oromia that ‘Political groups can function but there is still some way to go. A group now has their own right to announce their own political agenda. From the government or political opposition’s perspective the ability to function is good.’
- 4.2.7 DFID Ethiopia staff noted to the HO FFM team that the differing experiences between different political groups and that the main challenges came from non-state actors, ‘OLF have said their movements are being restricted. But this is from a spike in groups not government restrictions. Eskinder Nega’s [a journalist and leader of the Addis Ababa Baladera Council] group have been refused offices...it is not the government who are restricting them, it is groups at a regional level. In most cases there is a long way to go to reach international standards, it is broadly mixed.’¹⁵⁵
- 4.2.8 An April 2020 Inter Press Service article citing Daniel Bekele, commissioner of the Ethiopia Human Rights Commission stated: ‘Women politicians face unique forms of online and offline attacks and deliberate actions to discourage their participation in politics’.¹⁵⁶
- 4.2.9 The same article, citing Dinah Musindarwezo, director of policy and communications for Womankind Worldwide, noted: ‘Women political leaders face barriers such as their voices being overshadowed by political parties’ voices, limited access to adequate resources they need to make a difference and being held to different standards to those of men. Women leaders often face biased public criticism, harassment and intimidations just because they are women.’¹⁵⁷
- 4.2.10 The AI May 2020 report stated:
- ‘There have been repeated incidents where members, supporters and leaders of political parties have been unable to hold meetings, demonstrations, and press conferences due to violence and disturbances between opposition supporters and security forces. The police repeatedly prohibited Eskinder Nega, the leader of the Addis Ababa Caretaker Council, from holding press conferences in Addis Ababa. On 15 February 2020, the Oromia Special Police forcefully dispersed the supporters of OLF in

¹⁵³ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (1.f), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ IPS, ‘A Gender-equal Ethiopian Parliament can Improve the Lives of all Women’, 10 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ IPS, ‘A Gender-equal Ethiopian Parliament can Improve the Lives of all Women’, 10 April 2020, [url](#)

Welenchiti town when they gathered for the inauguration of OLF office in the town. Although there has been significant opening of the political space since 2018, Amnesty International has observed a surge in unlawful restrictions and violations by security forces targeting journalists critical of the government, and members and leaders of opposition political parties since June 2019.¹⁵⁸

See also [Freedom of expression and assembly](#)

For more information on women see [Ethiopia: Background note](#)

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4.3 Arbitrary arrest and detention

4.3.1 The USSD report 2019 noted: ‘Authorities detained persons arbitrarily, including activists, journalists, and opposition party members. There were hundreds of reports of arbitrary arrest by security forces.’¹⁵⁹

4.3.2 The same report stated: ‘Significant human rights issues included: reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings by security forces... unexplained disappearances; arbitrary arrest and detention by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; unlawful interference with privacy; censorship, and blocking of the internet and social media sites...’¹⁶⁰

4.3.3 HRW stated on 20 October 2018:

‘This week, the Ethiopian government released over 1,000 youth from “rehabilitation camps” following a month-long detention. They were among some 3,000 youth from the capital, Addis Ababa, whom the federal police commissioner, Zeynu Jemal, said had been arrested in September. Most were arrested at bars, shisha cafes, and khat dens. The police chief said the arrests were to address “rising criminality and disturbance” in the city, but smoking shisha (a flavored tobacco) and chewing khat (a mild stimulant) are not criminal offenses in Ethiopia.

‘The arrests came after several days of violence and tension in Addis, fueled in part by the return of some exiled, previously banned, politicians. At least 23 people were killed in the violence and security forces killed several more during a subsequent demonstration.

‘On October 16, the police commissioner said with a straight face that the youth would be released because “brainwashing” was complete. It is an apt term to describe a longstanding detention practice in Ethiopia, used most recently during the 2017 state of emergency. The authorities take people arrested to military camps, indoctrinate them in government policies and perspectives, and often force them to do strenuous physical exercise. The detainees are not charged with a crime.

‘These camps have no legal basis, and their recent use signals a worrying return to a period when the security forces frequently carried out arbitrary arrests...’¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ AI, ‘Beyond Law Enforcement... (3.2 General Elections), 29 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (section 1.d), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (Executive Summary and section 1.d. and 1.3.), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ HRW, ‘Mass Arrests, ‘Brainwashing’ Threaten Ethiopia’s Reform Agenda’, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

- 4.3.4 In the report of the HO FFM conducted in September 2019, Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted that:

‘We don’t see the government arresting people arbitrarily as it used to. Some reports indicate that we still see some arrests, but compared to the past they are not arresting that much or beating them up for their opinion. However, there are some concerns... Arbitrary arrests in mass numbers are witnessed, although rare.

‘However, that doesn’t mean that the situation is the same throughout the country. Our worst fears are more to do with arbitrary arrest in places outside of Addis. The local governments within regions are engaging in arbitrary arrests. The federal government appears to be well organised with the right constitutional rights in place but at the local level, the regional government act differently which does not match what the federal government does, for example there have been some human rights abuses committed.’¹⁶²

- 4.3.5 Wondemagegn Goshu also observed:

‘We hear about a lot of harassment from the police or security forces, which we think are genuine, but I do not think Abiy is involved in this. When it comes to rule of law, respecting human rights, respect for different languages etc, our culture is awful. There are definitely cases where individuals are arrested, beaten, refused to hold a press conference. The different groups fighting for their own status, for example the Amhara and Oromo.’¹⁶³

- 4.3.6 In the same HO FFM report William Davidson observed:

‘There have been continual arrests in Oromia and there is no clear link between the June [2019] assassinations and the people arrested in Amhara regional state.

‘In Amhara region the crackdown is seen as the Oromo making a move against the Amhara... If you look at Sidama, we know that 1,000 people were arrested for participating and organizing protests to demand a referendum for self-determination. A significant number were arrested in Amhara and then in Oromia.

‘The scale of the arrests is possibly not the same as in the past but the tactics are similar. We are hearing reports filtering through of thousands of journalists, activists and protesters being arrested in Oromia. However, if you look at the height of the Oromo protests, there has been a decrease in the number of arrests made.’¹⁶⁴

- 4.3.7 The HO FFM report noted that experiences in arrests could vary between regions. The legal expert noted:

‘Tigray –There are no such arrests in the Tigray region. They are doing their own business and the Govt. isn’t interfering in the Tigray region too much. There isn’t much interaction between the Federal Govt. and the Tigray regional Govt. But in the Amhara and Oromia regions the federal govt is

¹⁶² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

¹⁶³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

actively involved. There are mass arrests in both. In the Amhara regions, they are selective – it's influential people. In the Oromia region, it is not quite the same.

'In Amhara it's journalists, activists and those actively involved in reforming the security service have been arrested.

'The Somali Regional State [SRS] some people are arrested but it should have been done by the federal government including the former regional president .'¹⁶⁵

4.3.8 DFID Ethiopia staff noted to the HO FFM team in September 2019 that:

'There have been a couple of high-profile arrests and charges, head of [the National Intelligence and Security Service] NISS who is Tigrayan, arrest warrant issued. He has not been arrested due to political reasons, [but there is a] feeling that there is a targeting of Tigrayans... A long list of Tigrayan people arrested, there is a narrative that Tigrayan people have been targeted now. Think it is a past struggle, obviously I do not see this government has a principle for doing this. They have done better than previous government.

'However, it is true there are Tigrayans being arrested for political reasons and not for crimes committed. The current government have a principle vision, but how much does this flow through all the organs of states at the moment is unclear. There is central control over what regions can do, but we are not sure if there are capabilities to do this. There has been an over representation of Tigrayans in political positions, and people are abusing aspects of security situation and within the forces so that Tigrayans do not appear over represented.'¹⁶⁶

4.3.9 DFID Ethiopia staff also noted that, in regard to the number of politically-based arrests and detentions, '[t]he scale is different. Much lower [than in the past]'.¹⁶⁷

4.3.10 In relation to progress made under Abiy, One of the NaMA leaders opined that: 'The culture of political oppression by the Ethiopian government includes the use of techniques such as fabricated crime, harassment, discouraging political involvement at any level. A lot of politicians (including myself), journalists and human rights activists still expect they could be detained and re-detained.'¹⁶⁸

4.3.11 The Life and Peace Institute noted that:

'[There had been] [a]rrests only recently. Abiy became very angry, all the reforms what more do people need? He went the extra mile in the political space. Sometimes he wants to show muscle, for example with the Sidama case. He should have carried on with his soft power and diplomacy rather than what he did. The Sidama were correct and procedural, they have constitutional rights to claim what they want, they followed legal procedure

¹⁶⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

but he wasn't very responsive. We could have avoided what happened in Awasa [clashes between Ethiopian security forces and activists]. There was a set date to declare their independence and it wasn't taken seriously. A week before, there was panic and then he was threatening them in parliament. It was his way of being tough, wrongly.'¹⁶⁹

- 4.3.12 The same source also observed 'There are exceptional cases where we do have political prisoners but I do not think Abiy would go too far. The Bahir Dar incident [assassinations and alleged coup attempt] - now have 300 Amhara activists and political prisoners because of the nationalist issue. An example of this are the forces related to the Baladera Council, the plan for a caretaker government. He was so annoyed by that, impatience.'¹⁷⁰

- 4.3.13 The USSD report 2019 noted:

'Addis Ababa Police arrested and charged Frew Bekele, a professor at Rift Valley University, under the ATP, for authoring a book entitled The Hijacked Revolution. The book was highly critical of Prime Minister Abiy's administration, claiming Prime Minister Abiy no longer represented the Oromo cause. Police confiscated the book from book vendors throughout Addis Ababa. Three brothers who ran a bookshop in the capital were also arrested. As of October [2019] police continued to detain Frew and two of the three brothers.

'Local human rights organizations reported police detained more than 200 individuals for political reasons and detained close to 2,000 individuals in mass arrest roundups related to multiple incidents. The government claimed the arrests were criminal, not political.'¹⁷¹

See also [Overview](#), [Freedom of expression and assembly](#) and [Treatment of detainees/prison conditions](#),

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4.4 State reaction to assassinations and attempted coup of June 2019

- 4.4.1 In the HO FFM report of interviews conducted in September 2019 a number of sources referred to the assassinations/attempted coup in Amhara state on 22 June 2019 which lead to an immediate and widescale government response. The Horn of Africa Researcher noted that the alleged coup attempt was a 'wake-up call for the government'¹⁷². One of the NaMA leaders stated: 'After the June 22 [2019] assassinations, the political space was abruptly shut down when the government openly started to crack down on the opposition, media, journalists and dissent. Opposition voices, including our senior leaders, members and supporters have been arrested.'¹⁷³

- 4.4.2 In the same HO FFM report, Hassan Moalin, ONLF noted: 'The assassination in June 2019 affected the whole of Ethiopia, even for us in the

¹⁶⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (section 1.e), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

Somali region. Geographically we are very far, and it didn't make sense that we were accused, but the government are still struggling with the transition from the previous way of handling something like this to the new way.¹⁷⁴

- 4.4.3 The DFID Ethiopia staff noted in the HO FFM report that the coup attempt had 'spooked' the government and 'slowed them down a little.' The same source also observed: 'Opening up of the democratic space was based on the belief that everyone would act responsibly, but they haven't... The government know they have made mistakes so are now backing down. The assassinations in Amhara and of the chief of army was shocking. Because of this, the government are very cautious.'¹⁷⁵
- 4.4.4 Al Jazeera in 'Nearly 250 arrested in Ethiopia after foiled coup: State TV', 28 June 2019 noted: 'Nearly 250 people have been arrested in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa and the city of Bahir Dar since a coup attempt was foiled, the state-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation reported on Thursday [27 June]. The state broadcaster did not give any more details on who was arrested or when.'¹⁷⁶
- 4.4.5 Deutsche Welle, a German international broadcaster, in the news article 'Ethiopia: Hundreds arrested over coup attempt' 28 June 2019 noted: 'The Ethiopian government confirmed on Friday that more than 260 people have been arrested over a failed coup in the northern region of Amhara. The arrests included the spokesman of a political party that supports the Amhara ethnic group. 'The office of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced on Twitter: "212 suspects apprehended in connection with the coup attempt in the Amhara region while 43 individuals detained in Addis Ababa - investigations still ongoing with potential for more arrests."¹⁷⁷
- 4.4.6 In the HO FFM report of interviews conducted in September 2019, senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted: 'The government were arresting all members of the opposition [including 5-7 members of E-ZEMA], for example the Oromos, Amhara, Tigrayans in relation to the assassinations. People who were arrested during this period have either been linked to the assassination and released, or have remained in detention. At the time of the assassinations the federal government could not determine or find information in relation to the cause of the assassination, so many were arrested and detained for 3, 10 & 15 days. But around 90% were released and are still out.'¹⁷⁸
- 4.4.7 The legal expert in the HO FFM report noted: 'There have been lots of arrests but no specific numbers. On the day of the assassinations [coup attempt in June 2019] I was in the Amhara region, there were arrests there and a number of people arrested here in Addis. I know lots of people who were arrested in connection with that incident

¹⁷⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ Al Jazeera, 'Nearly 250 arrested in Ethiopia after foiled coup: State TV', 28 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ DW Akademie, 'Ethiopia: Hundreds arrested over coup attempt', 28 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

(assassination). If you go to prisons here, you get lots of people who were arrested in connection with that, but the investigation process is long, they don't have tangible evidence for acts of terrorism so they are released. The security forces suspect them but then say after 2 months they have been released with just their own ID as warrant of security, which is uncommon for terrorist suspects...' ¹⁷⁹

4.4.8 William Davison, Crisis Group, told the HO FFM team that there was '...no clear link between the June assassinations and the people arrested in Amhara regional state' ¹⁸⁰. Two sources stated to the HO FFM team that during this period, the security forces arrested people first then obtained evidence after. One of NaMA leaders questioned Abiy's commitment to obtaining evidence prior to arrest ¹⁸¹, whereas the senior representatives of E-ZEMA opined that this was not Abiy breaking his promise to reform this practise, but these were the actions of the police ¹⁸².

4.4.9 The legal expert observed to the HO FFM team:

'People have been released but people in investigation departments are somewhat confused by the cases. Police don't have information on what happened to the arrested. Many of the police are good friends with those arrested.

'If you take the assassination of the chief of the army, the PM hastily announced he was killed by his bodyguard – and he was also killed. But it's not true; he's [the bodyguard] still alive. And this adds suspicion.

'It seems that the govt has a hidden intention to make that mass arrest and relate it to the assassination. How these people were killed is not yet in known in public. Don't have a clear picture of the intention of the government and seems to be different policies.' ¹⁸³.

4.4.10 The HO FFM team were told by one of the NAMA leaders and the legal expert noted lengthy investigation and detention times or lengthy legal process at this time ¹⁸⁴ ¹⁸⁵. DFID Ethiopia stated this could feed in to the notion that they were political prisoners ¹⁸⁶. According to one of the NaMA leaders, the length of detention following the coup depended on the specific situation and/or area. In Oromia, most were detained for a week or two some others for months. In Benishangul-Gumuz, 29 people were arrested and detained for 2 months. People detained in Addis were detained for over 3 months ¹⁸⁷.

4.4.11 Africa news, citing reports from various news organisations, noted on 14 November 2019:

¹⁷⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

¹⁸² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

¹⁸³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

'Local media outlets reported that the Attorney General Berhanu Tsegaye said preparations were finalized to press charges against 68 suspects against whom material exhibits and technical evidences were collected ...[out of the] 68, 55 were from Bahir Dar – where the main attack was carried out – and 13 were from Addis Ababa, where the army chief and a retired general working to thwart the incidents in Bahir Dar were also killed.

'Authorities said the planning for the attacks were orchestrated in various parts of the country and had involved 110 people trained over seven weeks starting in April 2019.

'The Addis Standard said in a report: The training included "training in sabotage, psychological warfare, spying, intelligence gathering, as well as military and urban organization," among others, and were provided in various places including the capital Addis Abeba, Assosa, Hawassa, Afar region and various places in Amhara regional state. The training also involved former members of defense forces who were have either resigned or were reduced from the army.'¹⁸⁸

- 4.4.12 BBC Monitoring which published a report by the state-owned Ethiopian Press Agency on 26 February 2020 noted that charges were dropped and the decision taken to release 63 people who had been in custody:

'The decision to release the prisoners has to do with the government's effort to widen the political landscape and strengthen the ongoing reform, according to the director of the Office of the Attorney-General [OAG], Fekadu Tsega. The prisoners were suspected of corruption, involving in 22 June [2019] incident ...in the Amhara Regional State, mild human right violations, maladministration, violence in Sidama Zone, Benishangul-Gumuz and Somali regional states, said OAG Public Relations Director Znabu Tunu.'¹⁸⁹

- 4.4.13 The Freedom House report 2020 noted that 'Due process rights are generally not respected. While more than 10,000 people who had been arbitrarily detained were released after the change of political leadership in 2018, hundreds of new arrests have taken place since. Several hundred supporters of a regional opposition movement were arrested in the days following the assassination of the president of Amhara state in June 2019.'¹⁹⁰

- 4.4.14 The USSD report 2019 noted: 'A number of positive changes in the human rights climate followed Abiy's assumption of office. In recent months, however, the government used the Antiterrorism Proclamation (ATP) to buy time for investigations pertaining to the killing of government officials on June 22 [2019].'¹⁹¹

- 4.4.15 The USSD report also noted: 'In the wake of the June 22 killings in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa, police reportedly arrested more than 300 activists, politicians, and journalists...The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (HRCO) voiced concern over the arrests of members of NaMA, the Oromo Federalist

¹⁸⁸ Africa news, 'Ethiopia to charge 68 over June 22 foiled coup...' 14 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ Ethiopian Press Agency (via BBC Monitoring), 'Ethiopia drops charges...' 26 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia' (section B1) 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (Executive Summary), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

Congress (OFC), the Ethiopian Citizens' Party for Social Justice (EZEMA), journalists, and civilians.' ¹⁹²

See also [Assassinations and attempted coup](#) and [Anti-terrorism legislation](#).

For information on arrests after the assassination and attempted coup and their effect on specific political groups see [National Movement of Amhara \(NaMA\)](#) and [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ/E-ZEMA\)](#),

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4.5 Anti-terrorism legislation

4.5.1 See [the 2009 Anti-terrorism proclamation](#).

4.5.2 Reuters, in the article 'Ethiopian government and opposition start talks on amending anti-terrorism law', dated 30 May 2018 stated:

'Ethiopia's ruling coalition started talks with opposition groups on Wednesday on amending provisions of an anti-terrorism law that critics say has criminalised dissent, state-affiliated media said.

'Watchdog groups say the 2009 law's broad definitions have been used indiscriminately against anyone who opposes government policy. Among its provisions, it makes anyone publishing information deemed to encourage terrorism liable to a jail term of up to 20 years.

'The discussions follow the release on Tuesday of opposition leader Andargachew Tsige, who was sentenced to death under the law in 2009 over his role in the opposition group Ginbot 7, which the government has labelled a terrorist organisation.

'The Fana Broadcasting Corporation said 14 political parties, including the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, were taking part in talks having "agreed to amend" unspecified articles of the legislation.'¹⁹³

4.5.3 HRW noted on 27 October 2018:

'For a decade, Ethiopia's government has relied on repressive laws to silence dissenting voices and throw journalists and activists behind bars. The laws helped make Ethiopia into one of the most inhospitable places in the world for people speaking out against government policies, as well as for any human rights research and advocacy. Finally, it appears those laws... [including] the Anti-Terrorism proclamation... may change...

'The government used the...repressive 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation's broad provisions as the basis to arrest, detain, and prosecute scores of journalists and political opposition members, making it impossible to criticize government policies or actions without fear.'¹⁹⁴

4.5.4 The UN Human Rights Council noted in their 'Compilation on Ethiopia' dated 19 March 2019: 'The United Nations country team expressed concern that

¹⁹² USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (section 1.c), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³ Reuters, 'Ethiopian government and opposition start talks...' 30 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ HRW, 'Hope for Revision of Ethiopia's Draconian Laws?', 27 October 2018, [url](#)

the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation 652/2009 was incompatible with international human rights standards.’¹⁹⁵

4.5.5 In respect of trial procedures for government critics, Freedom Now’s response in the UN Human Rights Council’s, Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions, 4 March 2019 noted that ‘the lack of judicial independence had led to the trials of Government critics being riddled with due process violations and with conviction effectively pre-ordained. Due process violations had been particularly egregious for individuals charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation.’¹⁹⁶

4.5.6 In the HO FFM report of interviews conducted in September 2019, several sources noted since the assassinations and alleged attempted coup in June 2019 there had been the use of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) to arrest, detain and charge people despite the law being in the process of reform ^{197 198 199}. Senior representatives of E-ZEMA stated these included journalists, supporters of NaMA and OLF Shene²⁰⁰.

4.5.7 The legal expert commented to the HO FFM team on the continued existence of the ATP:

‘If you look at the intention to introduce these laws [reforming the ATP the government is] ...inclined to use the former way of the previous regime and there is a genuine lack [of] commitment to reform, at least in this area (the security sector) this is just my assessment.’ The same source noted on the re-use of the ATP:

‘My assessment is that there is a lack of commitment from the government, but also the security services are reinstating former officials, so the deputy from the previous regime has now become the head of intelligence. The intelligence agency arrested them [those suspected/linked to the June 2019 coup] suspecting for terrorism but later they released few of them by using the IDs of the suspects and this clearly shows how the allegation is fictitious. They detained them under the ATP; the ATP is being used as an instrument to frustrate the people.’ ²⁰¹

4.5.8 The senior representatives of E-ZEMA observed to the HO FFM team:

‘The police and security forces who are currently out on the streets patrolling are the same police, security forces, and prosecutors that were in power during the previous regime. There is a long history of people being persecuted/prosecuted under the ATP law. In the past, people who opposed or spoke out against the government would be charged under the ATP law, this can be seen here today because the police act in the way the police

¹⁹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, ‘Compilation on Ethiopia’ (para 16), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, ‘Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions...’ (para 24), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

²⁰¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

previously would have done. Previously we had dictatorship system and it is too soon after the change of structure to not go back to that.’²⁰²

- 4.5.9 The Horn of Africa researcher on being asked by the HO FFM team about the scale of the use of the ATP, was only aware of investigations under the law since the June 2019 coup attempt. The researcher noted that in a few cases the government had been using the remand provisions in the law and queried whether this was to allow time to gather evidence. The source added that since the government had committed to reform the law it was difficult to know why it was again being used²⁰³.
- 4.5.10 While the Political Section, British Embassy stated to the HO FFM team: ‘There were arrests on the back of the assassinations and in some cases the ATP was used to buy more time to hold suspects in detention. But so far this is different from widescale arrests and prosecutions under ATP witnessed in the past.’²⁰⁴
- 4.5.11 The AI report ‘Ethiopia 2019’ noted: ‘Hundreds of political opposition members, journalists and others who were critical of the government faced unfair trials on charges brought under the ATP law.’²⁰⁵
- 4.5.12 The United Nations Special Rapporteur for freedom of expression, David Kaye, in his end of mission statement from a visit to Ethiopia between 2-9 December 2019 noted:
- ‘...the Government continues to deploy the much-despised Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) even as its effort to repeal and replace it seems stalled in Parliament...
- ‘The Government confirmed its continued use, including against activists and journalists in the past months’ outbreaks of violence. Although I understand the journalists who had been charged under the Proclamation were subsequently released, the use of this particularly restrictive legislation may erode public trust in the ongoing reform process. I would strongly encourage the Government to promptly repeal the Proclamation and replace it with a new law that clearly and narrowly defines the crime of terrorism.’²⁰⁶
- 4.5.13 The HRW report 2020 noted:
- ‘The government rewrote the country’s restrictive 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP); the new draft was under review in Parliament at time of writing. However, following the alleged coup plot in June, dozens of ethnic Amharas, including journalists, were held under the ATP’s remand provisions. At time of writing, 13 detainees were still held on pre-charge detention, under an obscure procedure that allows for indefinite pre-charge detention after the four months allowed under the ATP had elapsed. Twelve are members of the political opposition, seven of whom are members of the

²⁰² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

²⁰³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ AI, ‘Ethiopia 2019’ (Unlawful killings), 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ UN OHCHR, ‘United Nations Special Rapporteur...’ 5 December 2019, [url](#)

National Movement of Amhara (NAMA), an ethno-nationalist opposition party, and five are members of an Amhara activist cultural movement.’²⁰⁷

- 4.5.14 Bloomberg in ‘Ethiopia Loosens Anti-Terrorism Law Used to Subdue Opposition’, 3 January 2020 stated:

‘Ethiopian lawmakers approved a bill to replace notorious 2009 counter-terror legislation that rights groups said the authorities used to suppress dissent and freedoms.

‘The Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism bill “fills the gaps in the previous law” by giving suspects access to the full legal system including regional courts, according to a record of parliamentary proceedings.

‘Searches without an order from the police chief will be illegal under the new rules, which also introduce a witness-protection program and require suspects to be presented in court within 48 hours of arrest.’²⁰⁸

- 4.5.15 France-24 in ‘Ethiopia adopts new version of much-criticised terrorism law’, 3 January 2020 reported:

‘Ethiopian lawmakers have replaced anti-terrorism legislation that had drawn criticism from rights activists, although Amnesty International said the new version still had the potential to be used against government critics.

‘The new law, adopted Thursday [2 January 2020], removes text invoked to arrest scores of journalists and politicians over the years. A vaguely-worded provision to punish acts “encouraging terrorism” has been axed in favour of more specific language targeting “incitement”... But the law also criminalises the vague act of “intimidation to commit a terrorist act.” And it empowers lawmakers to identify and ban terrorist organisations, a move used in the past to outlaw opposition parties...

‘The new law notes that the old version had “loopholes which produced a negative effect on the rights and freedoms of citizens” and needed to be revised.

‘Opposition politician Merera Gudina told AFP Friday that it was too early to tell what the effects of the new law would be. “We fear ruling party functionaries used to old habits could use the new law to target opponents,” he said.’²⁰⁹

- 4.5.16 The [Proclamation to provide for Prevention and Suppression Terrorism Crimes](#) was adopted on 2 January 2020 and gazetted on 25 March 2020²¹⁰

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4.6 Treatment of detainees/prison conditions

- 4.6.1 The USSD report 2018 noted:

²⁰⁷ HRW, ‘World Report 2020 – Ethiopia’ (Freedom of Expression...), 14 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ Bloomberg, ‘Ethiopia Loosens Anti-Terrorism Law ...’, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ France24, ‘Ethiopia adopts new version of much-criticised terrorism law’, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰ Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia, ‘Proclamation ...’, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

'In July Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report²¹¹ documenting torture, rape, long-term arbitrary detention, and inhuman detention conditions in Jijiga Central Prison between 2011 and early this year. The cycle of abuse, humiliating treatment, overcrowding, inadequate food, sleep deprivation, and lack of health care in Jijiga Central Prison, also referred to as Jail Ogaden, was consistent with the government's long-standing collective punishment of persons who were perceived to support the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), previously designated by the government as a terrorist organization, a designation removed in June [2018].'²¹²

4.6.2 The DIS report 2018 noted 'Conditions in prisons in the Somali Region were particularly dangerous for the detainees who were at risk of being submitted to torture...Both sources [a national researcher and a blogger]– one with first-hand experience of torture in the Makelawi centre – underlined the risk of being exposed to torture by the police if the authorities suspected one of being a terrorist.'²¹³

4.6.3 HRW report 2019 stated 'Earlier this year, Ethiopia closed Makaelawi detention center, known for torture and mistreatment of political prisoners...Many detention centers run by regional administrations, some well-known for ill-treatment, rape, torture, and lack of access to medical and legal aid, remain unaffected by the reform efforts.'²¹⁴

4.6.4 The same report noted: 'In Jail Ogden, a regional detention facility administered in part by Liyu police, prisoners were tortured, with no access to adequate medical care, family, lawyers, or even, at times, food. After...July [2018]...many prisoners were released from Jail Ogaden. The prison was closed in August [2018].'²¹⁵

4.6.5 And that 'Government officials often dismissed allegations of torture, contrary to credible evidence. But in a July speech to parliament, Abiy admitted that the government used torture and other unlawful techniques on suspects, acknowledging that such techniques amounted to terrorism by the state.'²¹⁶

4.6.6 The UN Human Rights Council in the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Ethiopia dated 4 March 2019 noted:

'AI [Amnesty International] stated that torture and other ill-treatment was a routine interrogation tool, especially for people suspected of terrorism. While the principal aim of torture was to extract "confessions", cases had been documented where torture was being used to force people to testify falsely against others suspected of terrorism. Allegations of torture and other ill treatment by accused in terrorism trials were rarely investigated. Additionally, objections by the defence to the admissibility of forced "confessions" as evidence, had mostly been rejected and judges have received the

²¹¹ HRW, "We are like the dead"...(p.20), July 2018, [url](#)

²¹² USSD, 'USSD report 2018' (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹³ DIS, 'DIS report 2018' (5.3.2), September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Impunity, Torture...), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Impunity, Torture...), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁶ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Impunity, Torture...), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

confession as admissible evidence irrespective of how they may have been obtained.’²¹⁷

- 4.6.7 The same report, in a submission complied by contributions from various human rights and legal organisations stated: ‘...the judicial response to complaints of torture and ill treatment during police or prison custody had been unacceptably inadequate and inconsistent, raising serious questions as to the independence and capacity of the judiciary. On many occasions, the judiciary had refrained from its responsibility of protecting the rights of detained accused.’²¹⁸
- 4.6.8 The Amnesty International (AI) annual report ‘Ethiopia 2019’, covering events in 2019, published 8 April 2020 noted: ‘The trials [brought under ATP law] were marked by illegal and prolonged pre-trial detention, unreasonable delays and persistent complaints of torture and other ill-treatment.’²¹⁹
- 4.6.9 In the HO FFM report of interviews with a number of sources in September 2019 noted a general improvement in treatment, including during arrest and in detention, by the state. The Horn of Africa researcher noted ‘pre the last 2 months [September 2019] we were receiving many less reports of detention and mistreatment in detention’²²⁰. While DFID Ethiopia staff noted a reduction in state perpetrated violence, decreased reports of torture and a decrease in murders committed by security forces²²¹.
- 4.6.10 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa university, told the HO FFM team that there have been examples of beatings by police as there has not been much change within the security forces, but these were individual incidents²²².
- 4.6.11 A number of sources gave examples to the HO FFM team of detention without proper access to psychologists or social workers²²³, food and water, medical care and mental and physical harassment or abuse^{224 225}. One of the OLF officers stated there had been a clash between the prisoners and police in Sankale the week prior to meeting the FFT (September 2019) and more than 150 people were injured, including women²²⁶.
- 4.6.12 However, one of the NaMA leaders noted to the HO FFM team that they were able to complain about detention in cold rooms and subsequently prisoners were moved. There were some long interrogations and a difficulty in getting proper medication, but the source stated, ‘I have to be honest, there is not any physical harassment so far... Compared to previous arrests this seems better, as there are [sic] no torture and reported physical abuses.’²²⁷

²¹⁷ UN Human Rights Council, ‘Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions...’(para 27), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, ‘Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions...’(para 26), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁹ AI, ‘Ethiopia 2019’ (Unlawful killings), 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²²⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

²²¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

²²² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

²²³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

²²⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

²²⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

²²⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

²²⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

- 4.6.13 William Davison, Crisis Group, to the HO FFM team: 'I'm told there isn't physical abuse of prisoners in Addis. I am not sure if it is also the case in the Amhara region but in Sidama most of the complaints are generally more about abuse of process rather than physical abuse of people.'²²⁸
- 4.6.14 The HO FFM team interviewed Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University who stated that he was involved in and reporting on the prison reforms. He had visited prisons, spoken to federal prisoners, CSOs and others and noted the positive reform of the federal prison administration. The source was unsure about the situation in relation to police or at local regional level. However, he noted that families could visit, treatment was good and the prison guards who used to commit torture from the previous regime, had stopped, or been charged. The source stated: 'The use of systematic torture by government authorities has ebbed; I do not think it is happening. [...] I have seen that treatment during detention is good, it is nothing like the previous regime.' Additionally, the source noted the Ethiopian Human Rights Council's mandate to monitor prisons and conduct unexpected visits²²⁹.
- 4.6.15 The HO FFM team were told by the legal expert: 'I do not agree with torture and do not think it is happening in custody. Inhumane treatment may happen in police stations, but no torture takes place in Oromia.'²³⁰
- 4.6.16 The USSD report 2019 noted that after the 22 June 2019 killings in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa:
- 'Media reported that police detained suspects in "inhuman" conditions inside the Addis Ababa Police Commission compound in Piassa, where they were kept in crowded, cold, and dark cells and only allowed to use the toilet once every 24 hours. According to media reports, police also did not allow family members and friends to visit the suspects. Police called detainees for nightly interrogations where they were forced to stand for long periods of time...
- 'On July 6 and 7 [2019], media reported police detained a group of suspects and kept them in cold, dark cells with very limited access to toilets. The detainees began a hunger strike, which lasted for a few days, and on July 8 [2019], police brought the suspects to court on allegations of committing terrorist crimes. The detainees reportedly continued to be held at a police station in Addis Ababa in connection with the June 22 killings.
- 'On August 1 [2019], Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated during a press briefing that his government was committed to the respect and protection of human rights and to ensuring the rule of law. He denied reports of torture as well as keeping detainees in dark cells.'²³¹
- 4.6.17 The same report noted:
- 'Prison and pretrial detention center conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. There were reports authorities physically abused prisoners in detention centers, military facilities, and police stations. Problems included gross overcrowding and inadequate food, water,

²²⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

²²⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

²³⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

²³¹ USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (section 1.c), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

sanitation, and medical care. Pretrial detention often occurred in police station detention facilities, where conditions varied widely and where reports stated there was poor hygiene and police abuse of detainees.

‘Visitors to political prisoners and other sources reported political prisoners often faced significantly different treatment compared with other prisoners. Allegations included lack of access to proper medication or medical treatment, lack of access to books or television, and denial of exercise time.’²³²

4.6.18 The AI May 2020 report stated:

‘Former detainees at Harqelo, Finchawa, Tolay and Sanqale spoke of dire detention conditions, including lack of sufficient food, beddings, and recreational activities. The police station in Harqelo, where the command post detained hundreds of people at a time, was congested due to the large number of detainees. Police detained children in the same prison halls as adults at Harqelo Police Station... The detainees at Harqelo Police Station had limited access to family members. The conditions were also inhumane due to the congestion and the lack of proper beddings.

‘The detention conditions in Sanqale were particularly harsh due to a shortage of food, severe punishments and harsh interrogation sessions. Former detainees in Sanqale told Amnesty International that Oromia police locked detainees all day in prison halls built from iron sheets, except for brief periods in the mornings and evenings when they could take toilet breaks. There were serious shortages of food and water. The police provide them with only three buns to eat a day. There was a time when the police did not provide food to the detainees for three consecutive days. Some detainees collapsed due to hunger during that time. Furthermore, the detainees were only allowed one shower a month.’²³³

See also [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#) and [Arrests and detention in Oromia and of OLF/Shene/OLA and Military training/rehabilitation camps](#)

For more information from sources on military training camps/rehabilitation centres in Oromia see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

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4.7 The Liyu police and their treatment of people in the Somali Regional State (SRS) and eastern Oromia regions

4.7.1 HRW report 2019 noted:

‘Liyu police continued to commit abuses in the region and, at times, killings in neighboring Oromia regional state.

‘Abdi Illey resigned and was arrested in August, two weeks after Liyu police and youth loyal to him attacked residents and burned property in the regional capital, Jijiga. He remains in government custody but has not been charged. Police head Abdirahman Abdillahi Burale (known as Abdirahman Labagole) resigned in August, but despite evidence of his involvement in committing

²³² USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (section 1.c), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

²³³ AI, ‘Beyond Law Enforcement...’ (section 5.3 5.4), 29 May 2020, [url](#)

human rights abuses, Abdirahman Labagole and other members of the Ethiopian army or Liyu police implicated in abuses against civilians have not faced any charges.’²³⁴

- 4.7.2 ACLED noted in ‘Change and Continuity in Protests and Political Violence in PM Abiy’s Ethiopia’, published 13 October 2018, covering trends since April 2018 that:

‘Violence in the Somali region has often involved the Liyu Police (‘Special Police’) a paramilitary force, both engaging in violence against civilians and in a high-profile clash with the federal military in August, which are closely tied to the former president of the Somali region, Abdi Illey... there has been an increase in the number of violent events associated with the Liyu Police paramilitary forces in the months following Prime Minister Abiy’s swearing in, as well as a shift towards their use of violence against civilians. The Liyu Police have been accused of a number of human rights abuses and have faced criticism from groups like Amnesty International for engaging in violence against civilians... Since Abdi Illey’s arrest in late August [2018], the activities of the Liyu Police have dropped dramatically.

‘The instability associated with the “Liyu Police” allude to the existence of subregional power-brokers in Ethiopia that are seeking to consolidate their power and advance their own interests in this period of political flux.’²³⁵

- 4.7.3 HRW in ‘Interview: Inside What Was Ethiopia’s Jail Ogaden’, 10 July 2019 noted: ‘There’s are [sic] also the formidable challenge of reforming the security forces and rebuilding institutions like the judiciary that for years were suppressed or subject to politicized appointments. Positive steps have been taken in reforming the abusive Liyu police, although it’s still early days yet. The government’s commitment to these initiatives is commendable.’²³⁶

- 8.5.1 During the FFM of September 2019, the British Embassy and Hassan Moalin, ONLF noted the changes within the Liyu police in the Somali Regional State (SRS), which have received training and re-education on human rights. The Political Section, British Embassy, described it as ‘a really encouraging picture at present’^{237 238}. Hassan Moalin also noted the decline in involvement of the security sector, including the Liyu police, in the political arena in the SRS²³⁹.

- 4.7.4 The Horn of Africa Researcher, the British Embassy and Hassan Moalin told the HO FFM team that in the Somali Regional State there had been efforts to hold those responsible for human rights abuses accountable, including the arrest of the former state president Abdi Illey^{240 241 242} and the Horn of Africa Researcher added, the prosecution of high-level personnel and Liyu

²³⁴ HRW, ‘HRW report 2019’ (Impunity, Torture...), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵ ACLED, ‘Change and Continuity...’ (Geographic Shifts in Violence), 13 October 2018, [url](#)

²³⁶ HRW, ‘Interview: Inside What Was Ethiopia’s Jail Ogaden’, 10 July 2019, [url](#)

²³⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Political section, British Embassy [url](#)

²³⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

²³⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

²⁴¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

²⁴² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

police²⁴³. Hassan Moalin, ONLF, expressed concern, however, that the process may be stalled at federal level ²⁴⁴.

4.7.5 Abdi Iley, ex-president of Somali Regional State was arrested in August 2018 in relation to human rights abuses in SRS during his tenure and charged in January 2019. He pleaded not guilty in October 2019²⁴⁵. In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)) no further information could be found on the progress of this case.

4.7.6 Reuters in the article 'Ethiopian who demanded justice now has half a year to deliver it', 28 January 2020 noted:

'Mustafa Muhumed Omer [president of the eastern Somali region since August 2018] began demanding justice after his uncle disappeared and continued despite threats to his mother and sister, and the torture and death of his brother....

'Abiy granted amnesty to the ONLF in return for a promise to engage in peaceful politics. Now Mustafa ... is dismantling structures that rights groups say were used to imprison, torture, and kill thousands of people.

'He has shut down a prison nicknamed "Jail Ogaden" notorious for torture, ... and retrained the feared paramilitary Liyu police. His predecessor, Abdi Iley, is on trial for fomenting violence, charges he denies. Journalists and aid agencies, previously banned, are now free to work in the region...

'[In 2016] Liyu police dragged his brother from their father's house in the early hours of the morning. Hours later, Mustafa said, three police threw his brother from the back of a moving truck, killing him in front of their horrified father. "I talked to people who buried my brother and who saw the body, and they said the body had a lot of wounds," he said. "He was tortured."

'Two of those police are now in jail pending the outcome of their trials. A third is being sought. The scale of abuses means not every perpetrator can be prosecuted...

'Mustafa conceded that few perpetrators had been brought to justice, and said his region will establish its own truth and reconciliation commission after the vote. He could not change parliament without an election, he said.'²⁴⁶

See also [Treatment of detainees/prison conditions](#)

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4.8 Students and youth organisations

4.8.1 The DIS report 2018 noted:

'According to the Danish Refugee Council, youth organisations of the opposition parties seem to be very well organised and very well controlled. The Danish Refugee Council representative further explained that a member of a political youth opposition group would be at risk of detainment depending on the specific situation. It is violence and violent actions, which

²⁴³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ Addis Standard, 'Ex-Somali Region President Pleads Not Guilty...', 20 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ Reuters, 'Ethiopian who demanded justice now has half a year to deliver it', 28 January 2020, [url](#)

are criminalised rather than membership by itself. However, it is the authorities who have the ultimate power to define what would be perceived as violence and thereby of politicising collective and individual actions. This assessment was shared by other sources and the representative of the British Embassy added that the Prime Minister had said that “everybody” from the opposition now had a seat at the table as long as they are not engaged in terrorist or other violent activities.’²⁴⁷

4.8.2 The same report noted:

‘Ethiopia has a history of political agitation at the university and student protests across regions are not uncommon. According to both NGO and diplomatic sources the security forces have at repeated occasions had recourse to rough violence against participants in student demonstrations ...many had been arrested and detained without being charged with any crime.

‘Several sources concurred that during that State of Emergency, which was declared in February 2018, the general situation for students had improved. The national researcher assessed that the risk of university students for being victims of harassment by the authorities, seemed to have decreased since January 2018. Many of the 20,000 prisoners who have been released by the Government over the past years were probably student activists.’²⁴⁸

4.8.3 And, in its executive summary the same report noted: ‘The overall situation for opposition parties has improved following the nomination of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. This relative improvement also included the youth branches of those opposition parties.’²⁴⁹

4.8.4 See also [Qeerroo/Qeero/Qeerro Bilisummaa](#) and ONLF [Support and ability to function](#)

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Section 5 updated: 8 March 2020

5. All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP)

5.1.1 The Political Handbook of the World, 2015, noted that ‘the AEUP is an outgrowth of factionalization within the All-Amhara People’s Organisation (AAPO) which initially supported the EPRDF but went into opposition over the issues of ethnic marginalization.’²⁵⁰

5.1.2 The USSD report 2018 noted ‘On February 14 [2018], authorities released Mamushet Amare, former leader of the All Ethiopian Unity Party, whom authorities had detained on terrorism-related charges since March 2017.’²⁵¹

5.1.3 The Reporter in ‘Blue ceases its existence In a bid’, 5 January 2019 noted:

²⁴⁷ DIS, ‘DIS report 2018’ (6.1.1), September 2018, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ DIS, ‘DIS report 2018’ (7.1, 7.2), September 2018, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ DIS, ‘DIS report 2018’ (Executive Summary) September 2018, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ Political Handbook of the World 2015, (Ethiopia), 2015, [url](#)

²⁵¹ USSD, ‘USSD report 2018’ (section 3), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

'A year ago, it was reported that Blue [Semayawi Blue Party] was in a discussion to merge with All Ethiopian Unity party (AEUP); however, AEUP is not part of the recent merger. In this regard, The Reporter asked the vice chairman [of Semayawi Blue Party] , the current status of their discussion with AEUP.

"We are still open to work with any other party so long as they are willing to cease their existence. Of course we were in a discussion with AEUP to merge but they are not willing to cease their existence," Getaneh explained.'²⁵²

- 5.1.4 The Ethiopia Reporter in the article, 'AEUP elects Mamushet Amare as chairman', dated 13 April 2019 stated:

'The All Ethiopian Union Party (AEUP), which was conducting its general assembly in the presence of 459 members last weekend, elected Mamushet Amare as the new chairman of the party while Abraham Getu was elected as the deputy chairman....

'The party announced the change of the leadership at a press conference held on Thursday April 11, 2019...recently, the executive committee of the party has unanimously decided to reunite the elected president, Mamushet and other members of the party who were in an internal rift with the former president, Abebaw Mehari. Following the agreement to reunite the leadership, the two sides agreed to work together and intensify the struggle to address the questions and demands of the public.

'The new leadership, ... was asked about the priority of tasks and its plan regarding their future political move and strategy. "Since we were busy in the send off of our general assembly members who came from different parts of the country to attend the general assembly; I cannot disclose the priority tasks and future political moves. However, I will disclose it shortly," the elected chairman Mamushet replied.

'In addition, the party has also disclosed that the new leadership is committed to cooperate and work together with other like-minded opposition political parties to address the demands of the questions of the party.'²⁵³

- 5.1.5 The Ethiopian Monitor, a daily news website noted that on 6 March 2020, the All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) and Balderas for True Democracy formed a coalition to compete in the 2020 national elections²⁵⁴.

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Section 6 updated: 4 March 2020

²⁵² The Reporter, 'Blue ceases its existence', 5 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³ The Reporter, 'AEUP elects Mamushet Amare as chairman', 13 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ Ethiopian Monitor, 'Balderas Forms Coalition with All Ethiopian Unity Party', 7 March 2020, [url](#)

6. Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ/E-ZEMA)

6.1 Composition

6.1.1 The Africa Report noted the emergence of a new political party in a report dated 14 May 2019:

‘Seven opposition parties dissolved themselves last week to create a new entity called Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ). The new party’s leader is Professor Berhanu Nega, an economics professor who has been involved in Ethiopia’s opposition since the late ‘70s.

‘The seven parties are:

- Patriotic Genbot 7,
- Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP),
- All Ethiopian Democratic Party (AEDP),
- Semayawi Party,
- New Generation Party (NGP),
- Gambella Regional Movement (GRM),
- Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party.’²⁵⁵

6.1.2 Borkena, a news and media website, in the article ‘Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party elected leaders’, dated 13 May 2019, noted the merger of 7 opposition parties. The article stated that the leader of ECSJ was Berhanu Nega (former leader of Ginbot 7). The deputy leader was Andualem Arage, the chairperson was Yeshiwas Assefa and Chane Kebede was deputy chairperson of the party. Berhanu Nega stated that the party’s priority was ‘stability and democratization of the country.’²⁵⁶

6.1.3 In the HO FFM report of a mission to Ethiopia in September 2019, senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted that the party was formed after the dissolution of 7 former political groups. The same source stated: ‘What we require from people who want to join E-ZEMA, is for dissolution of their political group properly by going through the election board and resubmitting and rebranding in their chosen election district.’²⁵⁷

See also [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

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6.2 Ability to function

6.2.1 In the HO FFM report senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted:

‘The regional government are willing to help us, if our members are arrested they will help their release. In deep Oromia, we were not allowed to hold a meeting which the higher central government have agreed to but the

²⁵⁵ The Africa Report, ‘Ethiopia opposition leader Berhanu Nega leads new party’, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁶ Borkena, ‘Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party elected leaders’, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

[government] at a lower local level it has not been agreed and allowed... In terms of the problems we face are for example, when we try to hold meetings some of our members are arrested or the meetings may be cancelled. We try to engage with the federal government which usually results in our members being released.’²⁵⁸

- 6.2.2 The HO FFM team were told that E-ZEMA had been able to campaign in Amhara and Tigray and had an open meeting with the youth in Addis Ababa. Although the organisation had some issues in functioning, they noted ‘An unidentified group broke into our office recently and they took our phones, computers etc. These are problems that we must accept but we also accept the government are committed and willing. It is a mixed situation. As with most places there have been some issues, but we can manage them, we can negotiate and talk to middle and high-level government groups.’²⁵⁹
- 6.2.3 The USSD report 2019 noted: ‘EZEMA ... stated it was unable to open offices in parts of Oromia due to security problems or obstruction by local government officials.’²⁶⁰

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6.3 Arrests and detention

- 6.3.1 According to the senior representatives of E-ZEMA:

‘There is a risk of supporters being arrested. For us there is a difference between members and supporters which we have explained. But the woreda and federal government cannot always distinguish between the two, for example whoever chants E-ZEMA at a rally or meeting the government could arrest them. In some areas our supporters have been targeted and we are expecting that more of our supporters will be arrested again during the election period.

‘Still seeing some arrests of members, tends to be lower members at local level. It is not easy for people to join our party yet. People currently are still being arrested and then quickly released, a lot quicker than in the previous regime. If issues occur you go to the local level where it is harder for government or security forces to accept political opposition.

‘Before April 2018 when Abiy came to power, the government targets were obvious, it was a standard procedure of arresting and convicting the person quickly. Now in 2019 it is not the same, whenever we hear one of our members, supporters or followers have been arrested, we can ask for the security forces or police for evidence and if there has not been enough evidence, they can be released.’²⁶¹

- 6.3.2 The same source noted: ‘The government panicked after the assassinations and alleged coup attempt in June 2019, and was arresting 100s of members, including ours. We had about 5-7 who were arrested, but many of them have been released.’²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

²⁶⁰ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (section 3), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

²⁶² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

- 6.3.3 See also [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

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Section 7 updated: 22 June 2020

7. Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia (Medrek)

- 7.1.1 The Reporter Ethiopia noted in January 2019 that Medrek is the coalition of four parties; the Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party (ESDP), Arena for Sovereignty and Democracy (Arena), Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) and Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)²⁶³.
- 7.1.2 Anadolu Agency, a state run Turkish news agency, noted on 6 December 2019 that Merera Gudina is the chairman of the coalition MEDREK, a coalition of three parties including Merera Gudina's own party the OFC²⁶⁴.
- 7.1.3 The CIA World Factbook, updated 22 June 2020, stated the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum/MEDREK/FORUM's leader was Beyene Petros. The coalition included Ethiopian Social Democracy-Southern Coalition Unity Party (ESD-SCUP), OFC, SLM, and Union of Tigrayans for Democracy & Sovereignty (UTDS.)²⁶⁵
- 7.1.4 For further details on the aims and objectives of the organisations that comprise the Medrek coalition, see the Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party (ESDP) [website](#), the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) [website](#). Amongst sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)), a website for Arena for Sovereignty and Democracy (Arena) could not be found.

See also [Release of prisoners](#) and [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#)

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Section 8 updated: 4 March 2020

8. National Movement of Amhara (NaMA)

8.1 Establishment of the party

- 8.1.1 The Addis Standard, on 19 June 2018 noted that Dessalegn Chanie Dagneu was the President of the newly founded National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) party.²⁶⁶
- 8.1.2 The same article, in an interview with Dessalegn Chanie Dagneu, noted:
'Over the past 6 months, we have made enough preparations to establish the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA). Preparation of the party program, rules and regulations, framing our goals, ideological and strategic issues, organizational structure, party discipline and related guidelines,

²⁶³ The Reporter, 'Medrek calls for ...', 12 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ Anadolu Agency, 'Ethiopia: Merger, election and popular apprehension', 6 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁵ CIA, 'World Factbook' (Government: Ethiopia), 22 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ Addis Standard, 'Ethiopia: NAMA...', 19 June 2018, [url](#)

[among others]. Moreover, recruiting over 1500 founding members from five regions, pre-congress consultations, [and] preparations for the founding ...

‘The realization of NaMA is a great breakthrough and an important step in the struggle of the Amhara people for equality, socio-economic and political justice and above all the respect of God given rights of the Amhara people: the right to its basic existence and dignity. .. NaMA is expected to be a guardian of the fully fledged Amhara Nationalism and the "Amhara Questions".’²⁶⁷

- 8.1.3 In February 2020 NaMA announced changes to the leadership of its party replacing Desalegne Chanie, who served as chairperson since June 2018, with Belete Molla²⁶⁸. See the article on [Borkena](#) for a full list of leaders within NaMA.

For information on membership and profile, capacity and support see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

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8.2 Ability to function

- 8.2.1 In the HO FFM report of interviews conducted in September 2019, the HO FFM team were told by the Horn of Africa researcher: ‘NaMA party appeared to be the most organised although it has reportedly been hard hit since the June [2019] violence.’²⁶⁹
- 8.2.2 According to one of the NaMA leaders in the HO FFM report, in relation to the ability to function for NaMA, it depended on the area. Oromia was more difficult and there had been attacks on their offices. Both in Oromia and in Benishangul Gumuz Region, members and sympathizers had been harassed and arrested. One of the NaMA leaders told the HO FFT that the organisation had been able to open 160 offices. The organisation had held over 200 town hall meetings but the experience varied between locations. In Amhara they had held peaceful meetings weekly. In Addis Ababa, they believed pressure from the mayor’s office meant they were unable to use the hall for a meeting due to ‘security concerns’ (which they did not believe were genuine or evident)²⁷⁰.
- 8.2.3 DFID Ethiopia staff told the HO FFM team that ‘NaMA is a new movement in Amhara they are nationalist, and they seem to be able to do a lot, they have held a meeting and the government did nothing to stop it.’²⁷¹

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8.3 Arrests and detention

- 8.3.1 The BBC News article dated 27 June 2019 noted that according to NaMA ‘dozens’ of its supporters were arrested following the alleged coup in the

²⁶⁷ Addis Standard, ‘Ethiopia: NAMA...’, 19 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ Borkena, ‘National Movement of Amhara elects new chairperson’, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

²⁷¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

Amhara region in June 2019²⁷². Al Jazeera stated that NaMA reported 56 of its members were detained on 26 June 2019²⁷³.

8.3.2 In the HO FFM report, according to one of the NaMA leaders:

‘After the June 22 assassinations...Opposition voices, including our senior leaders, members and supporters have been arrested. Over 500 Amharas accused of being a member and sympathizer of NaMA have been arrested...

‘Senior leadership in NaMA have been arrested. The head of PR and secretary general are still detained, they are charged under the ATP law and conspiracy to instruct a coup. National council members, senior leadership of Addis, prominent Amhara activists, politically enlightened Amharas; people who are mostly well educated with masters degrees have also been arrested. Some people arrested also include government employees in Addis Ababa, government attorneys who criticised Abiy in his meeting with Judges and Attorneys, Kebele and sub-city experts who oppose the move by ODP to “Oromize” Addis...dominate the bureaucracy have been arrested in the aftermath.’²⁷⁴

8.3.3 The NaMA leaders also told the Ho FFM team:

‘At first we thought we should give the benefit of doubt to Abiy, when in his inaugural speech to the parliament that “we won’t imprison without having the evidence at hand”. The June 22 killing was a massive disaster. When the government started arresting Amharas, we called for the government to bring evidence of their criminal involvement. But even after 4 months, there is no[t] any evidence presented before the court, showing the involvement of the arrested Amharas in the June 22 killings and the attempted “coup”...

As at September 2019, the source stated party leaders, members and Amharas were still under unlawful government detention, despite a Federal Supreme Court ruling to release them on bail. The source observed: ‘Given all these ups and downs, we believe that Abiy and head of National Intelligence and Security Services are involved in these decisions. All these people arrested are not involved in any crime, it is political.’²⁷⁵

8.3.4 In the HO FFM report the legal expert noted:

‘There is a conspiracy theory that the Amharas do not believe the people who are accused by the government of the assassination did it. The way the assassination has been investigated is somewhat dubious, within an hour they had announced to the media who had conducted the attack and their motives for doing so – in one hour.

‘If you look at the party for Amhara nationalists, some of them are under arrest. Journalists too. And under our laws, it should be the regional police who investigate; but it is not – it is the Federal police... Mass arrests in Addis working for newspaper and TV and members of political parties. These that

²⁷² BBC, ‘Ethiopia Amhara unrest: Opposition supporters ‘arrested’’, 27 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁷³ Al Jazeera, ‘Nearly 250 arrested in Ethiopia after foiled coup: State TV’, 28 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

are involved in Amhara politics or the National Movement of Amhara, which is a legally registered political party.’²⁷⁶

8.3.5 One of the NaMA leaders noted to the HO FFM team:

‘In some of the arrests, the security forces had made distinctions [between members and supporters of NaMA]. They had a list of members’ names who were active participants in Amhara causes, they were prominent names. But in some instances, we didn’t even know the names. 56 farmers in Meta town of Oromia were detained and charged with financially supporting or funding NaMA. It’s not unlawful to fund! Community leaders have been arrested, local business people were also arrested because they were suspected of funding our movement. Their charges clearly stated that they were found to be a member of an illegal organisation NaMA. We are not illegal organization, but we are formally registered party by the electoral board of Ethiopia. We reported all these illegal detentions in formal dialogue with the concerned authorities at the district and federal level, but no solutions were found.’²⁷⁷

8.3.6 William Davison, Crisis Group, described to the HO FFM team the government response to the assassinations as a crackdown that looked like ‘old EPRDF’. The same source noted that the political space had allowed ‘...the emergence of widespread beliefs in Amhara region that the federal government acted politically to the attacks and that an Oromo-led government acted against the Amhara movement.’²⁷⁸ Whilst the Life and Peace Institute opined:

‘The forces related to this caretaker govt, journalists, mainly NAMA, the PR [Public Relations] leader (Christian Tadele) is in prison. NAMA is extremely popular amongst the Amhara and Abiy has arrested the lead PR man for the group, I ask how come Abiy has imprisoned the face of the Amhara nationalist group, Abiy would not do this unless he has evidence because he understands that doing so would damage his cause...

‘Because we are not informed by the government, the rumour tactic is being used and we have seen a rise in rumours. In Amhara they are saying they are being attacked because of their identity. Abiy said let’s not make a mountain out of a mole hill and compared his arrests to Erdogan’s [in Turkey] after the coup attempt, don’t exaggerate the arrests and the need for them when it could have been worse... Abiy said we do not easily arrest journalists because this goes against our values and because it would make the journalist a hero, and why would we risk this again. So, there are political prisoners and I find this intriguing because I want to know what evidence Abiy has on them. My gut feeling is Abiy has the evidence to put high profile people in prison, otherwise it is like déjà vu and back to square one.’²⁷⁹

8.3.7 One of the NaMA leaders noted to the HO FFM team:

‘The ATP reform is supposed to take place this year, but the security forces and the AG’s [Attorney General] office are still using it to charge innocent

²⁷⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

²⁷⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

civilians.’ The source opined that the use of the ATP was a reversal of promises Abiy made. In some cases, the evidence produced after arrest was possession of the NaMA manifesto, stickers and membership fee receipts (legally allowed documents). The head of PR and secretary general of NaMA were arrested, detained and charged under the ATP law with conspiracy to instruct a coup²⁸⁰.

See also [Assassinations and attempted coup](#) and [Anti-terrorism legislation](#)

For more information on NaMA, including membership process, profile and support see [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#)

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Section 9 updated: 02 April 2020

9. Semayawi (Blue) Party

9.1.1 BBC Monitoring, in its publication dated 23 December 2018, stated that the Semayawi (Blue) Party was formed in January 2012 by former leaders of the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (UDJ) and the Andinet Party²⁸¹.

9.1.2 Africanews reported on 5 March 2018 that:

‘After the Supreme Court in Ethiopia reduced his jail rem [sic] in November last year, reports indicate that a top opposition official, Yonatan Tesfaye, has been released. Journalists and activists confirmed that he had been released from the Zeway prison located in the Oromia State.

‘According to blogger Befeqadu Hailu, his release was delayed after he refused to sign a ‘pardon’ statement’ Tesfaye spokesperson for Semayawi (Blue Party) was arrested in 2015 over Facebook posts deemed as incitive [sic] by the state. He was subsequently charged and convicted of “associating with a terrorist organization” after criticizing the government on his Facebook account.

‘The apex court slashed his six years and six months sentence to three years in November 2017 after his lawyer argued that his client had to be tried under common law and not the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP).’²⁸²

9.1.3 The Reporter in ‘Blue ceases its existence In a bid’, 5 January 2019 noted:

‘In a bid to form a nationwide, unified and strong opposition political party together with other like-minded opposition parties; the general assembly of the Semayawi Party a.k.a. Blue has decided to cease the existence of the party as of December 30, 2018, Getaneh Balcha, vice chairman of the party told The Reporter.

‘It is to be recalled that Blue was in a series of negotiations and discussions with other opposition parties – Patriotic Ginbot 7 Movement for Unity and Democracy and Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) and members of the former Unity for Democracy and Justice such as Andualem Aragie and

²⁸⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

²⁸¹ BBC Monitoring (subscription source), Semayawi Party, 23 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁸² Africanews, ‘Ethiopia frees politician jailed over 2015 Facebook posts’, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

Girma Seifu to form a nationwide political party focusing on the politics of citizenship and social justice.

‘To this effect the party that celebrated its seventh year anniversary along with its general assembly last Sunday has decided to cease the existence of the party and to focus on the realization of the agendas that the newly established party wants to achieve in the political arena of the country.

‘The newly established party will be inaugurated on the first week of February 2019, the vice-chairman further told The Reporter.’²⁸³

See also [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ/E-ZEMA\) Anti-terrorism legislation](#) and [Discrimination and harassment](#)

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Section 10 updated: 02 April 2020

10. Ginbot 7 (G7)/Arbegnoch (Patriot) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement (AGUDM)/Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7)

10.1.1 The official site for Ginbot 7 (undated, but the latest publications are dated 2012) stated that their primary mission was: ‘the realization of a national political system in which government power and political authority is assumed through peaceful and democratic process based on the free will and choice of citizens of the country.’²⁸⁴

10.1.2 The Addis Standard in a news article dated 2 January 2018, stated:

‘The federal high court 19th and 4th criminal benches here in the capital Addis Abeba have today sentenced a total of nineteen Ethiopians who were accused of terrorism related offenses to jail terms ranging from three years and ten months to 16 years and six months.

‘All the nineteen defendants were accused of having ties with Patriotic G7, a rebel group designated by the ruling party’s dominated parliament as a terrorist organization.’²⁸⁵

10.1.3 In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)) CPIT could not find information on the situation for the defendants in the above case (Getahun Beyene et.al) after sentence.

10.1.4 Africanews, in May 2018, noted that Andargachew Tsige:

‘...was sentenced to death in absentia in 2009 over his role in the opposition group Ginbot 7. He was subsequently arrested in Yemen five years later and extradited to Ethiopia. There has been a series of diplomatic and online appeals calling for his release over the period of his incarceration.

‘.... Andargachew served as secretary-general of the group which describes itself as a reform movement.’²⁸⁶

²⁸³ The Reporter, ‘Blue ceases its existence’, 5 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ Ginbot7, ‘About Us’ (Mission), undated, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ Addis Standard, ‘News: Two benches at federal high court...’, 2 January 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁶ Africanews, ‘Ethiopia govt confirms release of Andargachew Tsige...’, 29 May 2018 [url](#)

- 10.1.5 The USSD report 2018 noted ‘On May 29 [2018], authorities released Ethiopian-born British citizen Andargachew Tsige, second in command of Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7), a former government-designated terror organization delisted in June, on a “pardon under special circumstances.” Detained in 2014, Andargachew was serving two life sentences and was sentenced to the death penalty.’²⁸⁷
- 10.1.6 An Al-Jazeera report, ‘Ethiopian armed opposition group Ginbot 7 suspends attacks’, dated 22 June 2018, stated:
- ‘Ethiopian opposition group Ginbot 7 has said that it will cease armed attacks in the country following reforms announced by the new government. In a statement released on Friday on their Facebook page and confirmed by Ethiopian state media, Ginbot 7 said it would call off assaults in order to support the agenda of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who took office in April.
- “Our forces have received strict orders to refrain from any sort of armed resistance,” the statement said.’²⁸⁸
- 10.1.7 Africanews, an independent news organisation, reported on 10 May 2019:
- ‘The Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7) party in Ethiopia does not exi[s]t [sic] less than a year after its activities were regularized by the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed-led administration...
- ‘The state-run FBC reported on Thursday that PG7’s General Assembly had disbanded it for the sole purpose of forming a new party. The FBC report said its senior members in the persons of Andargachew Tsige and Ephrem Madebo, had quit their positions because they held foreign passports...
- ‘The new party to which PG7 is allied is the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice. The privately-owned Addis Standard said it was formed out of 7 parties including PG7. The other six have also dissolved their parties, the Addis Standard added.
- ‘Earlier in June 2018, PG7 announced a unilateral ceasefire – suspended all armed operations – with the view to engage in peaceful struggle. They returned to Ethiopia from their base in Eritrea in September 2018.’²⁸⁹
- 10.1.8 The Freedom House report 2020 noted the removal of Ginbot 7 from the list of designated terrorist organisations in June 2018 meant Birhanu Nega and Andargachew Tsige of Ginbot 7 were able to return to Ethiopia ²⁹⁰.
- 10.1.9 The Reporter, in an article published on 11 May 2019 noted that Ginbot 7 was defunct and the former leader Berhanu Nega was now leader of Ethiopian Citizens Party for Social Justice (ECPSJ)/E-ZEMA²⁹¹.
- 10.1.10 The UK FFT in September 2019 spoke to the Horn of Africa researcher who observed that the PG7 were no longer in existence having been disbanded

²⁸⁷ USSD, ‘USSD report 2018 section’ (1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁸ Al-Jazeera, ‘Ethiopian armed opposition group Ginbot 7 suspends attacks’, 22 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ Africanews, ‘Ethiopia’s Ginbot 7 dissolves, transforms into new ‘united’ party’, 10 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia’ (section B1) 4 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹ The Reporter, ‘Newly formed party elects former exiled...’, 11 May 2019, [url](#)

and the supporters amalgamated into other organizations such as NaMA²⁹². The Life and Peace Institute noted that E-ZEMA now included the former leader of PG7, Berhanu Nega²⁹³.

- 10.1.11 In the same HO FFM report DFID Ethiopia staff noted the integration of previously armed groups such as PG7 into the military or civilian posts had been successful in the Amhara region. The source noted that PG7 agreed to go into a training camp and the former head of the organisation was provided with funding²⁹⁴.

See also [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ\)](#) and [Treatment of opposition groups](#)

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Section 11 updated: 23 March 2020

11. Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

11.1 History and background

- 11.1.1 According to the ONLF website the organisation is a grassroots social and political movement founded in 1984. The organisation declared a unilateral ceasefire on 12 August 2018. In October 2018 the government and the ONLF signed a peace agreement²⁹⁵.

- 11.1.2 The Encyclopaedia Britannica stated:

‘Ogaden, arid region of eastern Ethiopia. It occupies the barren plain between the Somalia-Ethiopia border and the Ethiopian Eastern Highlands (on which Harer and Dire Dawa are situated)...

‘The region witnessed periodic unrest into the 21st century, and the Ethiopian government had a military presence there for various reasons—including insurgent activities that occurred periodically since the 1980s, tensions after the disputed 2005 general elections, and civil unrest in Somalia and Ethiopia’s intervention there in 2006. One group responsible for some of the recurring unrest with the government was the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which was formed in 1984. Its most well-known attack came in April 2007, when a group of ONLF fighters stormed a Chinese-managed oil exploration facility in Obole; 65 Ethiopians and 9 Chinese workers were killed. The government responded by having the military further crack down on the region. Human rights abuses were committed by both the government forces and the ONLF during their running conflict.’²⁹⁶

For more information on the history of the ONLF and the Ogaden (Somali Regional State) see [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#)²⁹⁷.

²⁹² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

²⁹³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

²⁹⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ ONLF, website, undated, [url](#)

²⁹⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Ogaden’, updated 29 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Ogaden’, updated 29 October 2018, [url](#)

- 11.1.3 BBC Monitoring noted Abdirahman Mohamed Sheikh Madey was elected as chairman on 12 November 2019²⁹⁸.

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11.2 Aims and objectives

- 11.2.1 The ONLF Twitter page, accessed on 02 April 2020 stated: ‘The Ogaden National Liberation Front struggles for the right of self determination of all Somalis in Ogaden’.²⁹⁹

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11.3 Membership

- 11.3.1 In the HO FFM report Hassan Moalin, ONLF explained the process for obtaining membership ‘We give them our political program and our bylaws. A form and they must write a statement saying they have to join our movement. Then they have the right to be elected. They also must pay a fee. They are bound by the bylaws. In some areas we hand out membership cards but not in all areas.’³⁰⁰ The same source stated that they have lots of supporters, but they are not all members³⁰¹.

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11.4 Support and ability to function

- 11.4.1 HRW in ‘Interview: Inside What Was Ethiopia’s Jail Ogaden’, 10 July 2019 noted:

‘Federal, regional, and local elections are scheduled for May 2020, and while it’s not yet clear what role the Somali Region’s opposition Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) might play in elections, it is an obvious milestone for the Somali Region’s reform trajectory. ONLF was previously considered a terrorist organization by the federal government, but following a peace agreement in October 2018, they were removed from that list, have been largely disarmed, and have been welcomed back into the Somali Region where they operate freely.’³⁰²

- 11.4.2 In the HO FFM report, according to Hassan Moalin ONLF approximately 70% of people in the Somali region supported ONLF. The organisation received support from the Ogaden Women’s Association (OWA) and the Ogaden Youth and Student Union (OYSU). The OYSU is a student union linked to the party, which has branches in 54 offices around the world³⁰³.

- 11.4.3 Hassan Moalin explained to the HO FFM team that ONLF has been able to submit their registration form to the Electoral Board which allows them to become a political party, and function throughout the country once they receive their certificate³⁰⁴. The Political Section, British Embassy noted that

²⁹⁸ BBC Monitoring, ‘ONLF’, 20 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ Twitter, ‘ONLF’, undated, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³⁰¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³⁰² HRW, ‘Interview: Inside What Was Ethiopia’s Jail Ogaden’, 10 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁰³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

‘[The] sticking point to [the] ONLF becoming a political party is citizenship. Many hold other nationalities, and [the] new law says you must be Ethiopian’³⁰⁵.

- 11.4.4 Hassan Moalin and the Political Section at the British Embassy told the HO FFM team that they considered that the ONLF were generally able to function with few difficulties^{306 307}. The British Embassy confirmed the ONLF had set up offices in Somali Regional State and had been provided with offices and cars by the regional government³⁰⁸. Hassan Moalin, noted they had an office in Addis Ababa. The source noted the arrest of a few people who were accused of carrying ONLF’s flag and trying to open an office³⁰⁹.
- 11.4.5 The Addis Standard reported via Twitter on 15 November 2019, that the NEBE had issued a certificate of registration for ONLF³¹⁰.

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11.5 Arrests and detention

- 11.5.1 In the HO FFM report Hassan Moalin, ONLF noted that there had been some arrests of the ONLF at woreda/local level but the numbers were small. The situation was better and although not 100% safe for the ONLF, it was not comparable to the actions of the previous government³¹¹. The legal expert and critic noted that the situation in relation to arrests in Somali Regional State was more stable than elsewhere³¹².
- 11.5.2 The same source stated ‘Under Abiy there is no difficulty with returning to the country from exile. No-one is being arrested for what they have done in the past (for the ONLF). It’s not an issue.’³¹³

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11.6 Armed wing

- 11.6.1 Al Jazeera in the article ‘Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list’, published 5 July 2018 summarised: ‘The ONLF is a separatist rebel group fighting for self-determination for Somalis in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. The group demands autonomy of this region and has claimed several attacks since 1994 aimed at Ethiopian forces in the area.’³¹⁴
- 11.6.2 The DIS report 2018 noted:
- ‘The ONLF has since the mid-1990s been engaged in conflicts against Ethiopian troops in the Somali Region located in the periphery of Ethiopia. As a political entity, the ONLF has been weakened over the past years although not to the same extent as the OLF according to the national

³⁰⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³⁰⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³¹⁰ Addis Standard, via Twitter, 15 November 2019, [url](#)

³¹¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³¹² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

³¹³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³¹⁴ Al Jazeera, Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list, 5 July 2018, [url](#)

researcher. He further elaborated that in terms of military power, ONLF has also been weakened lately in that its military outreach capacity has diminished.³¹⁵

- 11.6.3 In the HO FFM report Hassan Moalin, ONLF stated: 'Our ex- combatants was [sic] 4,000, and except those wounded and disabled we transferred the rest to the Somali Regional administration... Under Abiy it was agreed that former combatants would decide on an individual basis whether they wanted to be reintegrated into society or where to join the security forces.'³¹⁶
- 11.6.4 DFID Ethiopia staff noted to the HO FFM team that the Somali region was not operating through a modern formal disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process. The source noted that the former fighters were not being disarmed or integrated but being placed (or absorbed) into the security forces together where their previous ideology remained³¹⁷.
- 11.6.5 The British Embassy also noted in the HO FFM report that the reintegration of ONLF fighters had stalled and the fear was that the longer this took the greater the risk of disillusionment and a return to arms³¹⁸. Hassan Moalin, ONLF, noted that some could be attracted to other groups who could utilise their experience as trained fighters ³¹⁹.
- 11.6.6 The Political section, British Embassy, told the HO FFM team that they were not aware of any mistreatment by the state of returning ONLF fighters to the region. The source noted that process had been good, and the challenge surrounded those returning from other regions, without qualifications³²⁰.
- 11.6.7 Conciliation Resources, an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict, in 'One year on: moving from war to peace in Ethiopia' October 2019 noted:

'Despite the peace deal and the reforms that have already taken place, there are still huge challenges ahead for the Somali Regional State, particularly dealing with the legacies of the conflict and providing rehabilitation and reintegration support for victims and former combatants.

'The ONLF has demobilised its fighters, some of whom are now being reintegrated into security institutions. This pragmatic move and the swift support from the regional government, helped avert the violent armed confrontations witnessed in other parts of Ethiopia, such as western Oromia. However, more needs to be done to help demobilised fighters successfully return to civilian life.'³²¹

See also [The Liyu Police and their treatment of people in the Ogaden \(Somali\) and eastern Oromia regions](#)

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³¹⁵ DIS, 'DIS report 2018' (5.3.1) September 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³¹⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

³¹⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Hassan Moalin, ONLF, [url](#)

³²⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

³²¹ Conciliation Resources, 'One year on: moving from war to peace in Ethiopia' October 2019, [url](#)

12. Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)

12.1 Release of the chair and deputy chair from detention

12.1.1 The USSD report 2018 noted:

'Authorities released Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) chairperson Merera Gudina on January 17 [2018], following a decision by the attorney general to discontinue the multiple criminal charges against him. In 2017 the attorney general brought multiple criminal charges against Merera...

'Officials also released Bekele Gerba, OFC deputy chair, on February 13, after prosecutors dropped charges against him and his codefendants for leading protests against plans to expand the city of Addis Ababa.'³²²

12.1.2 Merera Gudina is the chairman of OFC³²³.

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12.2 Relationship with other political parties

12.2.1 A senior representative of the OFC told the HO FFM team in September 2019 that the organisation was a registered political party³²⁴.

12.2.2 On 11 September 2018 the OFC and (the formerly banned) Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) announced an agreement to work together³²⁵. Ethiopia Insight in their article published 1 March 2019 noted: 'OLF has agreed with the Oromo Federalist Congress, an opposition party led by Merera Gudina, that they will not field candidates against each other. Merera said in an interview last month that splitting the vote would disadvantage both parties.'³²⁶

12.2.3 In the HO FFM report of a mission to Ethiopia in September 2019, the senior representative of the OFC explained the relationship between the OFC and OLF stating that there was a tacit understanding not to divide the youth support and a future of co-operation, but the organisations had not merged. The same source opined that if the OLF and OFC joined forces, their support would mean they would gain 90% of the vote [the source did not specify if this was in Oromia or nationally] and the government would lose in the forthcoming election³²⁷.

12.2.4 The senior representatives of the OFC noted the government differentiated between the OLF and OFC, and were more agreeable to the OFC in comparison to the OLF³²⁸

12.2.5 Africa News in the article 'Ethiopia's opposition parties merge as election fever rises', 3 January 2020 noted:

³²² USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

³²³ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

³²⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

³²⁵ Africanews, Major Oromia parties agree merger for Ethiopia's 2020 polls, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

³²⁶ Ethiopia Insight, OLF integration underway...(OLF still not registered), 1 March 2019, [url](#)

³²⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

³²⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

‘Opposition parties in Ethiopia including Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Oromo Nationalist Party (ONP) have formed a coalition ahead of May’s national elections.

‘The coalition comes hardly a week after OFC unveiled its latest member, prominent activist Mohammed Jawar, who said he joined because of a “shared federalist” agenda...

‘The activist, who commands a huge among [sic] following among the youth in Oromo had earlier hinted on coalition talks telling the local Addis Standard news outlet that “there is really no ideological difference between Oromo political parties”. “I have always said Oromo is my party because to me the difference between OFC and OLF or any other Oromo party is just insignificant, it is non-existent,” Jawar said.

‘The OFC is led by Professor Merera Gudina, while Dawud Ibsa leads the OLF and General Kemal Gelchu heads the ONP. With prominent personalities like Jawar and Bekele Gerba, this coalition could be a force to reckon with.’³²⁹

- 12.2.6 The Addis Standard noted on 4 January 2020 that the coalition was called Coalition for Democratic Federalism (CDF)³³⁰. Ethiopia Insight explained that it was formed to “jointly field candidates for Oromia regional State Council and to form a national coalition with other parties that share similar programs and operate in different regional states”. According to reports, they plan to form a regional coalition government “based on election results”, with its head, and possibly the future Prime Minister, will be chosen according to the votes. But it remains a coalition, not a merger.’³³¹

Further details on the aims and objectives of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) can be found on their [website](#).

See also [Release of prisoners](#) and [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#)

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12.3 Arrest and detention

- 12.3.1 Ethiopia Insight in ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion’, 14 February 2020 noted:

‘Fikadu Ayana, a representative in Western Wellega of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)... was released on December 19 [2019], after being arrested for about six months. Fikadu told VOA [Voice of America, non English language source] that he spent four months in Kumsa Moroda before a transfer to Nekemte police station. He said he was charged with links to “Abbaa Torbee” [group of assassins—in the Dembi Dollo area whom locals said began executing government informants in 2017 during the Oromo protests] but after two months found not guilty and released.’³³²

- 12.3.2 There is no other specific information in sources consulted, on the arrest and detention of persons because of a link to the OFC (see [Bibliography](#)).

³²⁹ Africa News, ‘Ethiopia’s opposition parties merge as election fever rises’, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

³³⁰ Addis Standard, ‘OFC, OLF and ONP agree to form “Coalition...”’, 4 January 2020, [url](#)

³³¹ Ethiopia Insight in ‘Preaching unity but flying solo, ...’ 25 February 2020, [url](#)

³³² Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

See also [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#)

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Section 12 updated: 8 April 2020

13. Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)

13.1 History of the OLF

- 13.1.1 The OLF website (undated) stated: 'The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is a political organization established in 1973 by Oromo nationalists to lead the national liberation struggle of the Oromo people against the Abyssinian colonial rule. The emergence of the OLF was a culmination of a century old yearn of the Oromo people to have a strong and unified national organization to lead the struggle.'³³³
- 13.1.2 Amnesty International reported in October 2014 that when Mengistu Hailemariam was overthrown in 1991, the OLF was briefly part of a transitional government led by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition. However, the OLF always had an uneasy relationship with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – the strongest political party in the EPRDF coalition. These tensions led to the OLF leaving the transitional government in 1992³³⁴.
- 13.1.3 Human Rights Watch (HRW), from a 2005 report, stated, 'In fact, the OLF's exact origins are a matter of some controversy, but some trace the organization's roots back to a long armed struggle waged against Imperial rule throughout the Bale region of Oromia from roughly 1963-68. The Bale revolt remains a potent symbol of Oromo nationalism and the struggle for self determination.'³³⁵
- 13.1.4 The Sahan journal stated, in an article of March 2013, that Leenco (Lencho) Lata and Dr. Dima Noggo Sarbo were among the OLF's founders, and Dr Sarbo was briefly the first chairman of OLF³³⁶.
- 13.1.5 Online media outlet, Gadaa.com, provides a chronology detailing the [Birth of the Oromo Liberation Front](#) (1970-1995)³³⁷.
- 13.1.6 BBC Monitoring (a subscription source) provided a timeline of events for the OLF. The following excerpt is from the period of de-proscription of the OLF as a terrorist organisation in July 2018:
 - '12 July 2018. Declare a unilateral temporary ceasefire with Ethiopia in the wake of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's reforms. The group say that "the temporary declaration of ceasefire will take us to the final declaration of bilateral cessation of hostilities once and for all and conclusion of the conflict"
 - '7 August 2018. Reach a peace deal with the government following talks in Asmara, Eritrea. The two sides sign an agreement of

³³³ OLF, webpage (mission), undated, [url](#)

³³⁴ Amnesty International, 'Ethiopia: Because I am Oromo...' (P.19) 28 October 2014, [url](#)

³³⁵ HRW, 'Suppressing Dissent...' (p.9, footnote 12), May 2005, [url](#)

³³⁶ Sahan, 'Oromo Activists Launch New Political Party', 29 March 2013, [url](#)

³³⁷ Gadaa.com, 'Birth of the Oromo Liberation Front' (undated), [url](#)

reconciliation and agree on forming a joint committee to oversee the implementation of the agreement

- '14 August 2018. An OLF faction arrive in Addis Ababa from Asmara and are received by senior Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) officials
- '26 August 2018. Call for unity with other Oromo political parties at the Hilton Hotel in Finfanne, Addis Ababa, where discussions have been scheduled
- '6 October 2018. Say that they are working on disarming soldiers, highlighting that there are around 4,300 soldiers in Ethiopia, though only 1,500 have been disarmed so far
- '13 January 2019. The Ethiopian army launch air strikes targeting areas in western Oromia believed to be held by a faction of the OLF who have refused to disarm and have been blamed for violence in the region
- '18 January 2019. The commander of an OLF faction, Elias Gambela Gollo, reportedly accepts a peace offer following a meeting with Oromo traditional elders
- '23 January 2019. Agree to resolve conflict with the government through the mediation of the council of Oromo Abba Gadas, the Oromo traditional elders
- 29 May 2019. In a new agreement, the OLF says that "it will no longer have an armed group", agreeing to merge with Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)
- '1 November 2019. Agrees to work with political parties operating in the Oromia Regional State. The parties include: EPRDF (ruling coalition Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front), ODP (Oromo Democratic Party), FDRE (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia), ODP (Oromo Democratic Party), Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and ODF (Oromo Democratic Front)
- '15 November 2019. Becomes a political party. According to the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE): "Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is officially recognised as a legally registered party. OLF received a certificate of registration from the board today"
- 'January 2020. Signs an agreement with the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and the Oromo National Party (ONP) to form the Coalition for Democratic Federalism. The coalition aims to form a regional coalition government, to work towards free and fair elections, to support each other during the election campaigns, to work together to deal with conflicts that may arise during the election, and to democratise Ethiopia's multi-national federalism.'³³⁸

³³⁸ BBC Monitoring, 'OLF', 8 January 2020, [url](#)

For information on the Oromo, see also the country policy and information note on [Ethiopia: Oromos](#) and [Home Office fact-finding mission Ethiopia report: The political situation](#).

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13.2 Aims and objectives

- 13.2.1 Al Jazeera in the article 'Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list', published 5 July 2018 summarised: 'The OLF seeks self-determination for the Oromo people against what they see as Amhara colonial rule. Amharas are an ethnic group in the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia.'³³⁹
- 13.2.2 The OLF describes its aim as being 'to lead the national liberation struggle of the Oromo people against the Abyssinian colonial rule.'³⁴⁰ In order to achieve its aims, the OLF has stated that it is 'ready to go an extra mile in search of peaceful resolution of the political crisis in Ethiopia. The OLF is ready to contribute towards any meaningful peace effort, as it did in the past, to reach at a comprehensive settlement to bring peace to all peoples of the empire.'³⁴¹
- 13.2.3 However, it also stated that 'The protracted armed resistance under the leadership of the Front is an act of self-defense exercised by the Oromo people against successive Ethiopian governments, including the current one, who forcibly deny their right to self-determination. The OLF armed resistance targets the government's coercive machinery, not innocent civilians.'³⁴²
- 13.2.4 The OLF officers told the HO FFM team in September 2019 as noted in the HO FFM report that '...our goal is for liberty, equality, democracy and social justice. What we want is different to the reforms that are taking place, we expect what we want will not be respected until fair, free and reliable election will be conducted that should lead to real self-determination.... the reforms are very far from what were demanded and not in agreement with the wish and ultimate goals of our party.' They also listed the making of Afan Oromo a federal working language, the right for self-rule, and the respect for rule of law.³⁴³
- 13.2.5 In the same report, the Ambo University lecturers noted that the original aim of the OLF in the 1960s was to create a separate Oromo country but that the position now was different. The OLF wanted proportionate representation in the army and police, and Addis Ababa recognised as the capital of Oromia³⁴⁴.

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³³⁹ Al Jazeera, 'Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list', 5 July 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ OLF, webpage (mission), undated, [url](#)

³⁴¹ OLF, webpage (Policies, On Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Ethiopia), undated, [url](#)

³⁴² OLF, webpage (Policies, On Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Ethiopia), undated, [url](#)

³⁴³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- OLF officers, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

13.3 Structure and composition

- 13.3.1 The Reporter (a privately owned Ethiopian newspaper), in October 2018, stated the OLF was headed by Dawed Ibsa³⁴⁵.
- 13.3.2 The same article noted the merger of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), headed by Dawed Ibsa, and the United Liberation Forces of Oromia (ULFO), headed by Abdejelil Abdela as of 26 September 2018 and that the party would retain the OLF name³⁴⁶.
- 13.3.3 William Davison, in the HO FFM report noted that the government '[b]y legalising [the] OLF, it allowed Oromo activists and oppositions to openly self-identify as the OLF. Nevertheless, it is still hard to distinguish who and what the OLF is.'³⁴⁷ The Life and Peace Institute noted that the OLF were poorly organised and that those following it may not even know who the leader now is³⁴⁸.
- 13.3.4 Multiple sources informed the UK FFT that the OLF had splintered and was composed of different factions^{349 350 351 352 353 354}. Sources differed in their assessment of the number of factions. One of the NaMA leaders stated there were at least 4 groups³⁵⁵ whereas DFID Ethiopia estimated 6-7 factions³⁵⁶. Both William Davison, Crisis Group, and the Life and Peace Institute noted the split between the main OLF faction and the OLF faction 'in the bush' (i.e. the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA))^{357 358}.
- 13.3.5 The Reporter in its article, 'OLF politics, military splits', published 6 April 2019, noted:
- 'The army of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has officially separated from the party, OLF, which is basd [sic] in Addis Ababa...
- 'In an official statement released by OLF's army a.k.a. Waraana Bilisummaa Oromoo (WBO), the army said it no longer has any relationship with the party as well as the party's leadership in Addis Ababa.
- "Even if we had previously agreed to a ceasefire and settle our difference with the government, the government has continued to arrest our members and wage war on us," reads the statement.

³⁴⁵ The Reporter, 'OLF, ULFO sign agreement...', 6 October 2018, [url](#) (see bibliography for access)

³⁴⁶ The Reporter, 'OLF, ULFO sign agreement...', 6 October 2018, [url](#) (see bibliography for access)

³⁴⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

³⁴⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

³⁴⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

³⁵¹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

³⁵² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

³⁵³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

³⁵⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

³⁵⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

³⁵⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

“Since the agreement in Asmara, Eritrea, we have been expressing our commitments for the implementation of the agreement. However, the government was not showing similar gestures.”³⁵⁹

- 13.3.6 ACLED, noted on 9 April 2019: ‘In Ethiopia, the split formalised on April 1st between Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fighters and political party members highlights the failure of the peace agreement reached between the government and the OLF in August 2018 to address grievances within the Front holistically. This could lead to more fighting in the coming weeks in various regions.’³⁶⁰

- 13.3.7 The Addis Standard in the article ‘News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts’, dated 29 May 2019 noted:

‘In a fresh agreement signed today OLF-SG, led by Dawud Ibssa, disavowed links with all armed groups operating in its name and agreed to support peace efforts by the federal government and Oromia regional state.

‘The agreement was signed this afternoon in the presence of Oromia vice president Shimelis Abdissa, General Berhanu Jula, Military Operations Division Chief of the National Defense Force (ENDF), Addisu Arega, ODP secretariat, as well as three members of a civic committee formed to oversee broker a peace deal that oversaw the encampment of Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) members, including opposition politician Bekele Gerba and OMN executive Director and activist Jawar Mohammed.

‘Dawud Ibssa, leader of OLF-SG, said that his party will from now on disown any armed groups operating in its name in the country and that it will cooperate with the government in securing peace in areas where armed groups are still operating...’³⁶¹

- 13.3.8 In the HO FFM report the Life and Peace Institute and the legal expert noted the existence of the Addis Ababa based group^{362 363}, as did one of the NaMA leaders who explained it was led by Dawud Ibsa and was involved in peaceful engagement³⁶⁴.

- 13.3.9 One of the NaMA leaders noted that in addition to the Addis Ababa faction and the rebel group, there were two other OLF groups led by Gelessa Dilbo and Gen. Kemal Gelchu³⁶⁵. The Political section, British Embassy, noted ‘there is general infighting between OLF factions and youth groups.’³⁶⁶

- 13.3.10 Africa News in the article ‘Ethiopia’s opposition parties merge as election fever rises’, 3 January 2020 noted:

³⁵⁹ The Reporter, ‘OLF politics, military splits’, 6 April 2019, [url \(see bibliography for access\)](#)

³⁶⁰ ACLED, ‘Regional Overview – Africa’, 9 April 2019, [url](#)

³⁶¹ Addis Standard, ‘News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups...’, 29 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁶² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

³⁶³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

³⁶⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

‘Opposition parties in Ethiopia including Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Oromo Nationalist Party (ONP) have formed a coalition ahead of May’s national elections... Dawud Ibsa leads the OLF and General Kemal Gelchu heads the ONP. With prominent personalities like Jawar and Bekele Gerba, this coalition could be a force to reckon with.’³⁶⁷

See also [History of the OLF](#), [Oromo Federalist Congress \(OFC\)](#) and [Oromo Liberation Army \(OLA\)/OLF fighters](#)

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13.4 Registration and ability to function as a political group

- 13.4.1 At the time of the HO FFM in September 2019, various sources noted that the party was not officially registered^{368 369 370}.
- 13.4.2 In the HO FFM report OLF officers noted that the group operated in Addis Ababa and the surrounding area. The group were not legally registered but had a letter of recognition to confirm they could organise and train members, issued by the federal government. However, this was not accepted by local government outside of Addis³⁷¹. Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA stated that the OLF were allowed to register for the election, but not allowed to open regional offices³⁷². The OLF officers stated they opened 40 offices although 30 had since been closed³⁷³.
- 13.4.3 The representative from OFC told the FFT that there were splinter groups to the OLF but noted that the government was trying to register them. However, ‘The new election law states you cannot register two groups in the same name or with the same flag, hence this can create problems to both.’³⁷⁴
- 13.4.4 BBC Monitoring noted, however, that, according to the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) “Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is officially recognised as a legally registered party. OLF received a certificate of registration from the board today [15 November 2019]”³⁷⁵

See also [Arrests and detention in Oromia and of OLF/Shene/OLA](#)

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13.5 Size and membership of the OLF

- 13.5.1 The DIS report 2018 noted: ‘The OLF is active in the struggle for the liberation of Oromia region, the most populous region of Ethiopia with approximately 35 percent of the population.’³⁷⁶

³⁶⁷ Africa News, ‘Ethiopia’s opposition parties merge as election fever rises’, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

³⁶⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

³⁷⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

³⁷¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

³⁷² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

³⁷³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

³⁷⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ BBC Monitoring, ‘OLF’, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁶ DIS, ‘DIS report 2018’ (5.2.1) September 2018, [url](#)

- 13.5.2 In the HO FFM report the OLF officers stated they had approximately 6 million supporters on their return to Addis Ababa from exile and they have a lot of support in Oromia. Their members, including those formally 'underground', are active and operating³⁷⁷.
- 13.5.3 In relation to the membership process, the OLF officers noted that members are recruited from the community and given training, including on the party's political manifesto. They receive official membership cards. Duties of members include attracting supporters and opening offices³⁷⁸.
- 13.5.4 See [OLF militants/Oromo Liberation Army \(OLA\)](#) for numbers of OLA or 'fighters'.

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13.6 Queerroot/Queero/Queerroot Bilisummaa

- 13.6.1 The website for the queerroot (undated) stated it is the National Oromian Youth Movement and The National Youth Movement for Freedom and Democracy³⁷⁹. In the HO FFM report Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA, explained that the term queerroot was for the youth wing of the Oromo organisation 'National Oromian Youth Movement for Freedom and Democracy'.³⁸⁰
- 13.6.2 In relation to the group's aims the website for the queerroot stated 'The Oromo Youth (Queerroot Bilisummaa) struggle for freedom, true democracy, and self-determination rights. ...The central aim the Oromo people and Queerroot struggle is to form a nation/ country that guarantee freedom, democracy, equality and fraternity among its people.'³⁸¹
- 13.6.3 The Guardian, in its article dated 13 March 2018 stated 'In traditional Oromo culture the term [queerroot] denotes a young bachelor. But today it has broader connotations, symbolising both the Oromo movement – a struggle for more political freedom and for greater ethnic representation in federal structures – and an entire generation of newly assertive Ethiopian youth.'³⁸²
- 13.6.4 The same article noted:
- 'As the Oromo movement has grown in confidence in recent years, so the role of the Queerroot in orchestrating unrest has increasingly drawn the attention of officials.
- 'At the start of the year police announced plans to investigate and crack down on the Queerroot, arguing that it was a clandestine group bent on destabilising the country and seizing control of local government offices. Party sympathisers accused members of being terrorists.
- 'Though many dispute this characterisation, few doubt the underground strength of the Queerroot today.

³⁷⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

³⁷⁹ Queerroot, 'Trying to build Ethiopian Unity ...', 12 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁸⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

³⁸¹ Queerroot, 'Trying to build Ethiopian Unity ...', 12 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁸² The Guardian, "Freedom!": the mysterious movement ...', 13 March 2018, [url](#)

'Since the previous state of emergency was lifted last August [2017], Qeerroo networks have been behind multiple strikes and protests in different parts of Oromia, despite obstacles like the total shutdown of mobile internet in all areas beyond the capital since the end of last year.'³⁸³

- 13.6.5 Open Democracy, an independent global media platform, in its article published 12 April 2018 noted the lack of available field research in relation to the Qeerroo and the difference in opinion as to the composition of the group³⁸⁴. It stated:

'...for the whole establishment, both majority and opposition, the Qeerroo ...represent an unpredictable threat, because no one knows where and how far it could lead...

'No one knows the precise goals or the level of organization of the Qeerroo and therefore whether they would be able to form a representative entity with clear objectives.'³⁸⁵

- 13.6.6 Borkena, an Ethiopian news and opinion website noted on 4 November 2018: 'Clandestine ethnic Oromo youth organization, it is called Qeerroo, is also proving a challenge to government in the region and beyond sometimes. Residents of the city of Harar in Eastern Ethiopia were without drinking water for nearly a month after Qeerroo structure in the region shut it down demanding for a ransom of 10 million Ethiopian Birr. It was only this week that the residents finally got water.'³⁸⁶

- 13.6.7 In the HO FFM report the Horn of Africa Researcher and William Davidson noted the difficulty in explaining 'qeerroo'³⁸⁷ ³⁸⁸. William Davison expressed the need for caution when using the term and that it was '...often abused and manipulated by others as much as it is useful'.³⁸⁹

- 13.6.8 The OLF officers stated the only active youth organisation was 'qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo' and they received orders from OLF. Since 2011 the OLF had established, trained and given orders for the activities of the qeerroos. In relation to current activity, the source stated they were a grass roots organisation that has now become more established with their own manifesto, website, radio station and media³⁹⁰.

- 13.6.9 In relation to the extent to which OLF were in control of the qeerroo, William Davison opined to the HO FFM team that there was not much organisation and that they were an insurgency opposition group³⁹¹.

- 13.6.10 Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA, noted to the HO FFM team the arrest of qeerroo radio operators 3 days prior to meeting with the FFT in September

³⁸³ The Guardian, "Freedom!": the mysterious movement ...', 13 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁴ Open Democracy, 'Twofold crisis in Ethiopia: the elites and the street', 12 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁵ Open Democracy, 'Twofold crisis in Ethiopia: the elites and the street', 12 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁶ Borkena, 'Oromo regional state added 6,000 forces...', 4 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D- Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

³⁸⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

³⁸⁹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

³⁹⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

³⁹¹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

2019. Media equipment was confiscated, and 5 journalists were arrested at the Addis Ababa office. The source stated they could not be found³⁹².

13.6.11 The Freedom House report 2020 noted: 'In October [2019], a group of five journalists working for Sagalee Qeerroo Bilisummaa, a media affiliate for an opposition Oromo youth movement, were charged with "incitement to terrorism" under the same law [terrorism laws]... [they] remained in prison at the end of 2019.'³⁹³

13.6.12 International Crisis Group in 'Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails', 16 December 2019 noted: 'Despite euphoria among the Oromo at Abiy's appointment, strife has continued in Oromia. Much has been linked to the August 2018 return of rebel Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leaders to Ethiopia. The week of their arrival saw Qeerroo youth groups run riot through parts of the capital, including its outskirts in Oromia, in some cases attacking people of other ethnicities.'³⁹⁴

For information on the media see [Ethiopia: Background note](#)

For information on the role of the qeerroo in the 'Oromo protests' see [Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Oromos](#)

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13.7 State differentiation between Oromos and OLF

13.7.1 The DIS report, based on a variety of sources assessed the risk faced in being affiliated with or perceived to be affiliated with the OLF:

'Previously, several sources concurred, it was connected to great risk for a person to be affiliated with the OLF, perceived or real affiliation, and this risk would also extend to family members of any person perceived to be an OLF activist. "Involvement" could be as little as receiving a suspicious email or phone call. During the previous State of Emergency which was declared in February 2018, the authorities arrested "a very high amount of people" suspected of being involved with activities of one of the organisations on the national list of terrorist organisations. The goal seemed to be to enforce the law through the arrest of "as many as possible" and therefore it has historically been impossible to determine whether a detainee was in reality member of an opposition group, a sympathiser or without any connection according to the representative of the British Embassy. With the arrival of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the situation seemed to have changed in that he had expressed a desire to include dissenting voices in politics...'³⁹⁵

13.7.2 The FFT asked sources whether there was a presumption by the state that an Oromo person was a member of, affiliated to or associated with the OLF. The senior representative of the OFC opined that Oromos were arrested on the basis of ethnicity and that if someone was against the government, they could be linked to OLF³⁹⁶. However, the Horn of Africa researcher noted that

³⁹² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

³⁹³ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia' (D1) 4 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ ICG, 'Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails' (section II), 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁹⁵ DIS, 'DIS report 2018' (Executive summary), September 2018, [url](#)

³⁹⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

prior to Abiy, this could be the case and that it was rare for an Oromo who was arrested not to be accused of being OLF but did not comment on the present situation in September 2019³⁹⁷. DFID Ethiopia staff observed ‘10 years ago then, yes... Objectively, I would say it’s not the case now. But there are some cases – it depends on your geography, history, background. I would caution against the assessment of if you are OLF and Oromo you are being targeted.’³⁹⁸

13.7.3 The FFT observed OLF flags and a sign on display on the main street in Ambo town which read “Ambo welcomes back the OLF and OLA”, and took a photograph of a poster at Ambo University, Oromia displaying the University’s main activities during the year 2018 (2011 in the Ethiopian Calendar) including the reconciliation between the ODP and OLF³⁹⁹.

13.7.4 The FFT asked the Ambo University lecturers about the visible presence of the OLF flag. The source explained that the OLF flag was considered the flag of Oromia and that it symbolises freedom. Even members of the authorities were seen wearing the OLF flag⁴⁰⁰. DFID Ethiopia also noted OLF flags were displayed everywhere, including in ODP offices⁴⁰¹.

See also [Registration and ability to function as a political group](#) and [Designated terrorist organisations](#)

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Section 14 updated: 29 June 2020

14. Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)/OLF fighters

14.1 Structure and leadership

14.1.1 In the HO FFM report of a mission undertaken in September 2019, the Horn of Africa Researcher observed that ‘OLF’ and the ‘OLA’ are sometimes used interchangeably. However, ‘...the OLA refers more to the fighters, and the OLF more to the political body that used to be mostly in the diaspora, who had control of the OLA. The extent to which OLF controls the OLA or more precisely the fighters who used to be connected to OLF/OLA is open to debate.’⁴⁰²

14.1.2 In the HO FFM report the legal expert and one of the NaMA leaders stated the leader of the rebel group [OLA] was Jal Mero⁴⁰³ ⁴⁰⁴, also known as Kumsa Diriba and Jaal Marro⁴⁰⁵. One of the NaMA leaders considered the Jal Mero group responsible for fighting with the government forces in West Wollega (part of Oromia)⁴⁰⁶. The Life and Peace Institute explained that this group ‘in the bush’ in West Wollega believed that freedom came from

³⁹⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

³⁹⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020 (para 9.8.2), [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁴⁰² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D- Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

⁴⁰³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵ Ethiopia24, ‘Interview With OLF commander Jaal Marro/Kumsa Diriba’, 18 September 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

fighting⁴⁰⁷. Garoma B Wakessa thought that the military commander of the OLF [OLA] was Gamachu Ayana⁴⁰⁸.

- 14.1.3 Ethiopia Insight in their article published 1 March 2019, also noted the western OLA leader was Kumsa Dirriba, known as Jaal Marroo and the

For information on the split between the OLF political wing and the OLA see OLF [Structure and composition](#)

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14.2 Return and re-integration of OLA/OLF fighters

- 14.2.1 A New Business Ethiopia report, 'Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 Oromo Liberation Front Soldiers', dated 13 February 2019 noted that it is estimated that the OLF has 'a few thousand soldiers'.⁴⁰⁹

- 14.2.2 The Reporter and Al Jazeera noted the return of OLF leadership and 1,500 members of their army /fighters from Eritrea to Ethiopia in September 2018^{410 411}.

- 14.2.3 The UN Human Rights Council in the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Ethiopia dated 4 March 2019 noted 'JS2 [The Advocates for Human Rights, Minneapolis, United States of America; and United Oromo Voices] stated that in September 2018, Oromo Liberation Front had been removed from the list of terrorist groups which had resulted in a number of fighters returning from a neighbouring country. It was unclear whether there will be accountability for previous alleged human rights violations.'⁴¹²

- 14.2.4 An Africanews report, 'OLF rebels in Ethiopia give up arms: Oromo officials', dated 16 February 2019, stated:

'Authorities in Ethiopia's [sic] Oromia state say up to 1,000 fighters with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) rebel group have given up arms and entered rehabilitation camps.

'... The deal between the government and OLF has run into trouble recently, with Addis Ababa deploying soldiers against armed members of the group it claimed were robbing banks and attacking residents in the remote west of the country. The OLF denied this, and has accused the government of failing to meet its promise of integrating its combatants into the armed forces.'⁴¹³

- 14.2.5 Ethiopia Insight noted in a March 2019 article that:

'Several hundred Oromo Liberation Front fighters have come out of the bush to begin integration into the regional security forces in line with a January [2019] peace pact, although there are still reports of political disagreement and insecurity.

⁴⁰⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ New Business Ethiopia, 'Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 OLF Soldiers', 13 February 2019, [url](#)

⁴¹⁰ The Reporter, 'OLF politics, military splits', 6 April 2019, [url](#) (see bibliography for access)

⁴¹¹ Al Jazeera, 'Thousands of Ethiopians hail return...' 15 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴¹² UN Human Rights Council, 'Summary of Stakeholders' submissions...' (para 16), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴¹³ Africanews, 'OLF rebels in Ethiopia give up arms: Oromo officials', 16 February 2019, [url](#).

'The former rebels went to temporary camps and most will be transported to Tolley, a military base. The encampment process scheduled for February 19 to 21 was extended to February 26 [2019]. The western and southern Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) commanders, two key figures, said they distrusted mediators and so have not participated so far.'⁴¹⁴

- 14.2.6 US news agency Bloomberg, in the article 'Returned Ethiopia Rebels Say Army Targets Them With Gunships', published 14 January 2019, stated 'Leaders of the OLF, formerly listed as a terrorist group by the government, returned to Ethiopia in September and the organization commands considerable influence in western Oromia. An OLF spokesman had previously said it reached an understanding with Ethiopia's government during talks in Eritrea that its armed wing wouldn't be dispersed.'⁴¹⁵

- 14.2.7 A New Business Ethiopia report, 'Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 Oromo Liberation Front Soldiers', dated 13 February 2019, stated:

'Over 1,000 soldiers of the armed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Ethiopia brought in to government camps for rehabilitation. The decision came following the latest agreement the former rebel group leaders have reached with the federal government and the regional state of Oromia.

'The team organized from both sides have brought in the soldiers from selected 12 zones and 22 weredas (districts) in Oromia Region, according to the peace mediators who briefed journalists last night along with representatives from both sides...

'...reports from West Wellega in Oromia Region of Ethiopia have been indicating that armed gangs who claim to be members of the OLF have been engaged in killing and abducting officials and burning some villages.

'To calm the growing tension between the federal government and the OLF, a few weeks ago elders and respected Oromo leaders such as, Abba Geddas have mediated the two sides. The decision of OLF fighters to put their arms down and enter government camp has come as a result of the mediation.'⁴¹⁶

- 14.2.8 The Reporter in its article, 'OLF politics, military splits' published 6 April 2019, noted:

'The agreement [in August 2018] made between the two sides was not made official to the public. However, in general terms, they have reached an agreement whereby the OLF lays down its arms and commit for peaceful political struggle. Yet, the terms of the agreements ...has been a point of contention for months.

'In September 2018, the leadership of OLF along with 1,500 members of their army based in Eritrea arrived in Addis Ababa, welcomed by regional and federal government officials and thousands of supporters...

⁴¹⁴ Ethiopia Insight, 'OLF integration underway...', 1 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ Bloomberg, 'Returned Ethiopia Rebels...' 14 January 2019, [url](#)

⁴¹⁶ New Business Ethiopia, 'Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 OLF Soldiers', 13 February 2019, [url](#)

‘OLF’s party leaders had also gave full responsibility of the army to the committee and agreed not to interfere in the process of disarming the army. Since then, only 800 army members of OLF have agreed to lay their arms.’⁴¹⁷

14.2.9 In the HO FFM report, one of the NaMA leaders noted one of the challenges faced with the reform process was the exiled opposition who returned. The source stated that groups affiliated with the armed elements of OLF were openly inciting violence⁴¹⁸. The Life and Peace Institute noted: ‘[Abiy]... co-opted some of OLF security (Dawud Ibsa was offensive OLF) to be incorporated into the Oromia security services. He brought OLF from Asmara into the security section. The OLF have wanted to put their own people into the security forces, and Abiy has made the mistake of putting an OLF defector [Brigadier General Kemal Gelchu] in charge in Oromia from Asmara.’⁴¹⁹

14.2.10 Ethiopia Insight in ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion’, 14 February 2020 noted:

‘The OLF’s re-entrance in 2018 two months after the terrorist designation was removed was followed by a largely failed attempt to integrate thousands of OLF fighters into regional forces, which were overseen by Oromia security chief Kemal Gelchu from October 2018 until he was fired seven months later. Kemal’s appointment perturbed OLF and its supporters as he was the leader of a rival OLF splinter group.’⁴²⁰

14.2.11 In the HO FFM report the Horn of Africa researcher stated that although a number of fighters agreed to join the security forces, there had been a lack of structure and they had since left⁴²¹. DFID Ethiopia staff, when asked about OLF fighters joining the security forces observed (although not specifically mentioning OLF) ‘Every armed group could come here and join the military for training or to be given civilian posts. Some areas this was more successful, for example the Amhara region.’⁴²²

14.2.12 The legal expert noted to the HO FFM team:

‘OLF were rebel groups and came back [to Ethiopia], were called to come back and there is no forum to work together or have a transitional democracy. No real arrangements. Then the soldiers and politicians came, and reintegration has not been done properly, both through negotiation or reintegration. Now they resort to rebel groups in the region. There is one group with their own security forces, leader and stronghold.’⁴²³

⁴¹⁷ The Reporter, OLF politics, military splits, 6 April 2019, [url](#) (see bibliography for access)

⁴¹⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

⁴¹⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

⁴²⁰ Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴²¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

⁴²² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁴²³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

- 14.2.13 The senior representative of the OFC opined to the HO FFM team that the reason the OLF army had refused to disarm since returning to Ethiopia was due to a lack of trust in the government given their historical relationship⁴²⁴.
- 14.2.14 The senior representative of the OFC explained to the HO FFM team that the fighters in the bush are the part of the OLF who have not laid down their arms⁴²⁵. The Horn of Africa researcher noted 'Between 8-10,000 fighters returned associated with OLF, a relatively small percentage of the returned fighters are still in the bush fighting.' The same source observed that; 'Officially, the OLF has stopped the armed struggle, but not all combatants were on board with that and so some have continued the guerrilla struggle, especially in Guji and Wollega. It is not clear to the extent they are under any sort of centralized control but it is not believed they are under any formal oversight from the OLF leadership.'⁴²⁶
- 14.2.15 Ethiopia Insight in 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion', 14 February 2020 noted:
- '...[A] January 2019 intervention by an Abbaa Gadaa Council ...led to talks between OLF and the government. Oromo activists and party members then formed a committee to oversee OLA's integration into regional forces. The committee delivered 827 OLA members but the Western Region Commander Dirriba Kumsa, aka 'Jaal Marro', turned down the offer after doubting mediators' independence and Southern Commander Gollicha Dhenge listed prerequisites.
- 'On April 1 [2019], OLA formed its own command to continue armed struggle saying that it had lost communication with OLF leaders in Addis Ababa. It released a report in July [2019] saying that OLA can discuss with the government, in the presence of a third party, if authorities stop arresting people for supporting OLF/OLA, agrees to a ceasefire, and allows OLA to encamp until free and fair elections, but under its own command.
- 'On October 8 [2019], Berhanu Jula, the military's Deputy Chief of Staff, told VOA [Voice of America] that the government is ready to reach a settlement and integrate the OLA, but refused to involve third party, saying Abbaa Gadaas were appropriate. Taye [the ruling party Oromia spokesman] told Ethiopia Insight on February 7 [2020] that security operations would continue until all "shifta" were eliminated, claiming that OLF fell back on armed resistance after failing to infiltrate the government and choosing not to compete democratically.
- 'In an allegation partially echoed by a senior Oromia official, OLF's Mikael argues that the government does not want the war to end as it fears free elections. He said: "The ruling party is using 'enforcing the rule of law' as its excuse to suppress the people and hinder the movement of the OLF because they know people love and see OLF as its own government.'" ⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

⁴²⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

⁴²⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

⁴²⁷ Ethiopia Insight, 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...', 14 February 2020, [url](#)

See also OLF [Structure and composition](#) and [Arrests and detention in Oromia and of OLF/Shene/OLA](#)

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14.3 Government and armed group clashes – Oromia

14.3.1 HRW provided a map of the Oromia region in Ethiopia⁴²⁸



14.3.2 US news agency Bloomberg, in the article ‘Returned Ethiopia Rebels Say Army Targets Them With Gunships’, published 14 January 2019 stated:

‘Rebels who returned to Ethiopia last year accused the army of targeting them with airstrikes after they called for the renegotiation of a peace deal with the government.

‘The Oromo Liberation Front, led by Dawud Ibsa, condemned the alleged attacks in a western part of Ethiopia by “airstrike and other methods.” The helicopter raids at the weekend damaged buildings and forced people to flee to nearby forests, said Falmata Jamal, a resident in Oromia state’s Gidami district.

“The government has to stop the killing of innocent people without any precondition,” the OLF said in a statement on its Facebook page, without giving a death toll. A spokesman for the Oromia regional government dismissed the claims as “propaganda” and said the federal army was in the area “to work on rule of law.”

‘The local Addis Standard website reported Sunday that the army had conducted airstrikes targeting OLF training camps in the region, citing an unidentified member of the military. An army spokesman, Mohammed Tessema, declined to comment.’⁴²⁹

14.3.3 Ethiopia Insight, in an article dated 1 March 2019 stated:

⁴²⁸ HRW, ‘Map of the Oromia region in Ethiopia’, 10 June 2016, [url](#)

⁴²⁹ Bloomberg, ‘Returned Ethiopia Rebels...’ 14 January 2019, [url](#)

'After peace efforts in November [2018], there was hope an August agreement between OLF and the government would be implemented. But the military announced a new operation in December and deployed soldiers to where OLA was thought to be active. The Command Post formed to secure the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia border zone stretched throughout western Oromia and reportedly pursued OLA and OLF members and sympathizers.

'In total, more than 1,000 people have been arrested for OLF links. The situation worsened on January 12 and 13 [2019] with airstrikes in Kellem Wollega, which the government denied...' ⁴³⁰

- 14.3.4 The Addis Standard in a May 2019 article 'News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts' noted:

'Several reports indicate that armed groups who are often accused of being members of Oromo Liberation Army, the armed wing of OLF-SG, are still active in parts of Western Oromia and Guji areas in southern Ethiopia...

'The signing of today's [29 May 2019] agreement [to support government peace efforts] means the federal government is likely to step up efforts to militarily deal with armed groups still active in western and southern parts of the country and are largely accused of being OLA members.' ⁴³¹

- 14.3.5 An opinion piece for Al Jazeera by US Political Science lecturer, Yohannes Gedamu, entitled 'Abiy's year one: Ethiopia faces the threat of ethnic conflict', published 2 April 2019, noted:

'The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which had been active in the region, made a deal with the federal government to lay down arms last year, but there have been reports that certain factions are still armed and in control of certain parts of Guji. The government for months has tried to downplay the power OLF still holds in certain parts of the country but locals continue to report attacks.' ⁴³²

- 14.3.6 The Addis Standard in the article 'News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts', dated 29 May 2019 stated:

'...reports of the killing of six people On Monday this week in western Oromia by a hand grande [sic] thrown at members of Ethiopian defense forces, according to a report on BBC Afaan Oromo.

'As is the case form [sic] most incidents in the past the exact circumstances of the death of the six people are not established. Local authorities tell the BBC Afaan Oromo that the deceased were community members who were caught in a crossfire when OLA members attacked the federal defense forces by throwing the hand grenade whereas residents said the six people died when the federal army took a counterattack measure against OLA.' ⁴³³

⁴³⁰ Ethiopia Insight, 'OLF integration underway...' (political games), 1 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴³¹ Addis Standard, 'News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups...', 29 May 2019, [url](#)

⁴³² Al Jazeera, 'Abiy's year one: Ethiopia faces the threat of ethnic conflict', 2 April 2019, [url](#)

⁴³³ Addis Standard, 'News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups...', 29 May 2019, [url](#)

- 14.3.7 The HO FFM report of the mission in September 2019 noted armed fighting continued in the Wollega and Guji regions with clashes between government and civilians, including burning houses. Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA opined this was because they were supporters of the OLA⁴³⁴. The Horn of Africa researcher similarly noted reports of a counter-insurgency campaign against alleged OLF in Oromia and destruction of civilian property⁴³⁵. The OLF officers stated in Oromia, human rights abuses had been committed including killings, vandalising, destruction and burning of property and rape⁴³⁶.
- 14.3.8 The Life and Peace Institute noted military force against OLF in western Oromia after the killing of officials and abolishing of local administrative structures. The source opined that the force was necessary to assert rule of law and that the OLF had made the area ungovernable ⁴³⁷.
- 14.3.9 DFID Ethiopia staff noted in the HO FFM report:
- ‘It may be possible that it is not in the OLF’s best interest to put down arms at the moment.
- ‘Reports of a military occupation, with some killings and bank robberies under OLF banner. They are saying “we don’t trust you to the government”. OLF say it’s historical, they have done this before in the 90’s. Their presence has been marginalised, in Guji their presence has decreased. The OLF are now in Addis saying they no longer want to fight. Their regional position has decreased but they are still there.’ ⁴³⁸.
- 14.3.10 The same source observed: ‘[there has been] Mixed reporting on who is responsible or who is doing what. E.g. one source will say “unknown [armed] group” whereas another will say “It’s the OLF”. It then depends on whether that is a centrally-issued command. We are seeing complaints after killings, and activists report on this, they are complaining about OLF. We do not know how substantive they are.’ ⁴³⁹.
- 14.3.11 Ethiopia Insight in ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion’, 14 February 2020 noted:
- ‘Activists and relatives of the deceased said the military killed 59 civilians on January 24 [2020] in Mugi town in Anfilo Woreda, Kellem Wellega. The OLF claimed another 21 people were killed in Gidami, Kellem Wellega Zone, on January 30 [2020], but the blackout means only limited information has seeped out. A non-OLF Oromo activist said the military retaliated brutally against Mugi’s residents after suffering a deadly ambush nearby. Taye [the ruling party Oromia spokesman] said that although there had been civilian fatalities, the reports of mass killings and displacements were mostly propaganda by OLA sympathisers.’ ⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

⁴³⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁴³⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴³⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁴³⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁰ Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

14.3.12 The same report noted:

‘The failed integration [of OLF fighters]—which included 1,300 encamped rebels that had returned from Eritrea— contributed to the solidifying of an insurgency in western and southern Oromia throughout 2019 by the armed wing of OLF, which last April formally split from the movement’s political leaders in Addis Ababa. Since, there have been continuing mass detentions by authorities at indoctrination camps and tit-for-tat claims of atrocities, such as grenade attacks, by both the OLA and government forces.

‘In recent months, there have been signs of increasing Oromo support for OLA, and its prominent western commander known as “Jaal Marro”, amid an intensifying government campaign to eliminate the group. “There cannot be two-armed forces or two governments,” Abiy said in parliament last week. “The attempt will still continue [to reduce civilian casualties], but to prevent the country from having two governments, legal action should be taken by the legal government.”’⁴⁴¹

14.3.13 The same source observed:

‘In western Oromia, the telecoms blackout has been in place since January 3 [2020] as the fight between OLA and government soldiers ramped up. There are also reports of renewed fighting in the two Guji zones and Borena Zone...

“‘Jaal Marro” told Kush Media Network (KMN) that western Oromia is largely under OLA control because most people are on its side and government structures are non-functional. Although that may be an exaggeration, support for OLA and “Jaal Marro” does indeed seem to have grown in the past six months as public hopes faded for the government to address popular Oromo demands.’⁴⁴²

14.3.14 BBC Monitoring, provided text of report by Ethiopia’s independent website Borkena, 25 February 2020:

‘On Friday last week [February 2020], the Burayu police commissioner was shot dead in the town.... The police commander of the “Finefine (Addis Ababa) special zone” was also shot, and he is currently in the Korean Hospital in the capital.

‘The assassination of government officials has become common in the Oromo region of Ethiopia. The government accuses a group that claims to be the military wing of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF declared in 2019 that it no longer has an armed group and that the government should enforce the rule of law and protect the security of citizens.

‘Currently, the Ethiopian government has a military operation in the Welega area [western Ethiopia] of the region where the armed groups (an OLF faction known as OLF Shane) operate. But the Oromo Liberation Front is accusing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s government of committing “genocide” in the region.’⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴² Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴³ Borkena (via BBC monitoring), ‘Armed men attack police station ...’, 25 February 2020, [url](#)

14.3.15 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘On January 2 [2019], fighters of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) abducted Delessa Bulcha, president of Dembi Dollo University, while he was travelling from West Wellega to Addis Ababa. The fighters released him after three days.

‘In May [2019] , OLA personnel in Oromia Region’s West Wellega Zone reportedly abducted and killed the ruling Oromo Democratic Party’s Seyo District head, Negesse Abu.’⁴⁴⁴

14.3.16 A report from the privately owned Ethiopia Observer via BBC monitoring on 15 January 2020 noted: ‘OLA, now acting independently from OLF, is battling the federal army in the western Oromia and has been linked to the recent abduction of dozens of Dembi Dolo University students and the assassination of higher government officials from the western Oromia and Benishangul-[Gumuz] Regional State, allegations the group rejects.’⁴⁴⁵

14.3.17 The Addis Standard in its report ‘Failed Politics and Deception: Behind the Crisis in western and southern Oromia’, 20 March 2020 noted:

‘Dozens of unarmed civilians have been shot dead by Ethiopian army soldiers operating in the Qellem Wollega district of the Oromia State over the course of the past five weeks. Estimates are that since January 20th [2020], over a hundred others have fled their homes for the relative safety of the neighboring Gambela region. Most victims appear to have been young men, suspected by soldiers of supporting armed Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) rebels who operate in the area and have maintained a virtually ubiquitous presence in the region’s forests and hills. These killings are but the latest to have occurred in the region that has over the course of the last year or so, turned into a war zone.

‘The majority of the recent killings took place in the town of Mugi of the Anfiloworeda, a lush coffee farming district of rural Oromia, located about 680 kilometers west of the Ethiopian capital Addis Abeba.

‘The area had been under the control of OLA rebels, but has since been recaptured by the army. The killings appear to be a retaliation against locals the federal army accuses of enabling the OLA presence. Last year, the Ethiopian army had been given the green light by the federal government to militarily crush the OLA. In the year since, the two sides have traded control of territory in and around Qellem Wollega. The jostling to oust the other side of their presence in the region has led to countless civilian deaths as well as the destruction of livelihoods and the local infrastructure.’⁴⁴⁶

14.3.18 The same report noted:

‘The conflict ... shows no sign of subsiding. The OLA leadership says its reasons for pursuing armed struggle are linked to a lack of democratic freedoms. It calls on the government to allow opposition parties to operate

⁴⁴⁴ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (section 1.b), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ Ethiopia Observer (via BBC monitoring), ‘Ethiopia’s Oromo rebels ...’, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ Addis Standard ‘Failed Politics and Deception...’, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

freely and to prosecute former EPRDF regime officials among other demands...

'But the federal government claims that it was forced into a foxhole by the group and left with no alternative other than the use of force. The Ethiopian government has deployed federal army troops and Oromia regional state Special Forces into the region which have engaged the OLA rebels in mostly rural settings, with battles being reported in thick forest terrain as well as in the mountains.'⁴⁴⁷

14.3.19 The AI May 2020 report noted:

'Researchers found that security forces deployed in the two Guji zones in Oromia carried out extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, forced evictions, and destruction of property...

'Our research found evidence that at least 39 people had been extrajudicially executed in Goro Dola District of East Guji Zone and Dugda Dawa District of West Guji Zone in Oromia since January 2019...

'People from semi-pastoralist communities in the rural localities of Goro Dola District were forcibly evicted as part of the law enforcement strategy by the command post. The forced eviction and resettlement of the semipastoralist communities disrupted their traditional way of life and negatively affected their livelihoods. This was in addition to the destruction and burning of homes, farms and businesses of people suspected to be supporters and members of the OLA in the two Guji zones by the Ethiopian Defence Forces (EDF), Oromia Police and local administration officials and militia.'⁴⁴⁸

The same report noted: 'Amnesty International documented multiple cases of torture and ill-treatment by EDF soldiers, members of Oromia police and Kebele militia in East Guji, West Guji, and Sanqale. Various people we spoke to talked about severe beatings they had received resulting in serious injuries.'⁴⁴⁹

14.3.20 The Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), in their compilation of information 'Ethiopia, First Quarter 2020: Update on incidents according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)' noted in relation to conflict incidents per province: 'In Oromia, 31 incidents killing 49 people were reported. The following locations were among the affected: Abomsa, Ambo, Ari, Aweday, Babile, Bedele, Bordode, Bule Hora, Dembi Dolo, Ejaji, Finchawa, Gefersa, Ginchi, Gondor, Guliso, Hawa Galan, Haya Dima, Jima, Mugi, Nazreth, Nejo, Nekemt, Shambu, Wolanchiti, Yabelo.'⁴⁵⁰

See also [Former designated terrorist organisations](#)

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⁴⁴⁷ Addis Standard 'Failed Politics and Deception...', 20 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁸ AI, 'Beyond Law Enforcement'... (Executive Summary), 29 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁹ AI, 'Beyond Law Enforcement'... (section 5.4), 29 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ ACCORD, 'Ethiopia First Quarter 2020' (Conflict incidents per province), 23 June 2020, [url](#)

14.4 Shene/Shane/Shane

- 14.4.1 BBC Monitoring in an excerpt from state-owned Ethiopian news agency ENA, 26 June 2019 noted:

'Inhabitants of West Oromia ... took to the streets yesterday to condemn the armed group of Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), known as Shene. Thousands of people took to the streets of West Wolega and Buno Bedele zones of Oromia [Regional] State to denounce the armed OLF group called Shene operating in the area. Youth participants of the demonstration called on the government to ensure rule of law by stopping the activities of OLF Shene group that kills and loots the people by falsely claiming to stand for Oromo people. Residents of the two zones, among the areas that the group is operating, protested in Gimbi and Bedele towns to denounce the group.'⁴⁵¹

- 14.4.2 In the HO FFM report of interviews undertaken in September 2019, sources differed in their definition and explanation of who or what 'Shene'/'Shane' (pronounced 'shen-nay') is. The OLF officers and the Ambo University lecturers explained the literal meaning was '5' referring to the top management or executive committee in the OLF organisational structure⁴⁵²⁴⁵³. The Ambo University lecturers, however, went on to note 'Currently there is a group called "Shene", who are rumoured to be a faction or splinter group of the OLF. The authorities claim that the Shene are our brothers. Shene is a group for the younger generation, it is the unemployed, the young, teachers, doctors.'⁴⁵⁴.
- 14.4.3 DFID Ethiopia staff noted to the HO FFM team that the head of the 'Shene' faction was in Addis preparing for the election⁴⁵⁵.
- 14.4.4 The OLF officers stated to the HO FFM team that the term was '...created by the government to be used as propaganda and to create some imaginary fears. The word "Shane" is repeatedly reported in the government media for attention and create confusion among public. They are calling the army left in the forest "Shane" but there is no organisation called "Shane".'⁴⁵⁶ The Ambo University lecturers similarly noted that it was used as a derogatory term by the government. The same source also noted 'The government makes a certain group a terrorist by naming them such, this enables the federal and regional government to arrest members... A good example of this is a splinter group of the OLF, "Shene". If you are considered to belong or affiliated with Shene you will be arrested as a terrorist or for fighting democracy.'⁴⁵⁷
- 14.4.5 ACLED in 'Regional Overview: Africa 24-30 November 2019', 3 December 2019 noted: 'In west Shewa district, unidentified militants shot and killed two Oromia state officials and a criminal prosecutor. Attacks of this type have killed at least 8 officials over the past year, with 5 fatalities occurring during

⁴⁵¹ ENA (via BBC Monitoring), 'Ethiopians denounce Oromo rebel faction', 26 June 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁵² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

the past month alone. The Oromia Liberation Front's breakaway faction "Shane" is thought to be responsible for the attacks.'⁴⁵⁸

14.4.6 The Africa Report, noted on 31 January 2020: 'Several Ethiopian media houses have reported that OLF-Shane, the military splinter wing of the OLF, has been waging war against the government in the Kelem Wollega region.'⁴⁵⁹

14.4.7 Ethiopia Insight in 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion', 14 February 2020 noted:

'[Of those detained in Sankele military camp] Some were accused of robbing banks or being "Shaane", which means supporting the OLA or OLF, or "Abbaa Torbee", the semi-legendary assassin—or group of assassins—in the Dembi Dollo area whom locals said began executing government informants in 2017 during the Oromo protests. Since the OLF was among exiled groups invited home in 2018, "Shaane" has been accused of taking hostages, destroying property, and mobilizing people to dismantle government structures. Some of those who were charged as terrorists before 2018 were threatened with the revival of those prosecutions and questioned over incidents during the past protests that helped bring Abiy to power, victims said.'⁴⁶⁰

14.4.8 See also [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA and Government and armed group clashes](#)

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Section 15 updated: 29 June 2020

15. Arrests and detention in Oromia and of OLF/Shene/OLA

15.1 Arrests and detention

15.1.1 In the HO FFM report of a mission undertaken in September 2019, Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA noted that on the day OLF returned on 15 September 2018 over 4 million people met the OLF at Meskel square (Addis Ababa). The source stated 150 people were arrested. In preceding weeks, the military commander of the OLF, Gamachu Ayana, was arrested and detained as well as other leaders and supporters⁴⁶¹.

15.1.2 The OLF website in a press release dated 19 January 2019 stated:

'... January 18, 2019, the Ethiopian government security has arrested Mr. Jabessa Gabbissa, member of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) Executive Committee and head of the OLF political affair. Similarly, Mr. Aman File, Dr. Buli Ejeta, Mr. Dambi Tashome, Mr. Galgalo Wariyo, Mr. Edosa Tadesse and several other members and supporters of the OLF were detained by the Ethiopian government security agent. A day earlier, on January 17, 2019, Colonel Gemechu Ayana and his friend Mr. Fakada were also arrested in

⁴⁵⁸ ACLED, 'Regional Overview: Africa 24-30 November 2019', 3 December 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁹ The Africa Report, 'Ahead of the 2020 vote...', 31 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ Ethiopia Insight, 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...', 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

similar fashion, and they are still held in the EPRDF detention center. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government is now conducting a mass arrest of hundreds of the Oromo people whom they suspect as the members and supporters of the OLF across Oromia.⁴⁶²

- 15.1.3 Ethiopia Insight in ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion’, 14 February 2020 noted: ‘Colonel Gamachu Ayana, an OLF Central Committee member, who returned from exile in September 2018 had charges pressed then dropped for organizing assassinations of officials and was then accused of terrorism along with 19 others. He was freed on December 24 [2019], after spending eleven months in “sostenga” Addis Ababa police station, which is close to Maekelawi, and Kilinto prison.’⁴⁶³
- 15.1.4 In the HO FFM report of a mission undertaken in September 2019 the legal expert and the Ambo University lecturers opined that if the government suspected someone as being affiliated with OLF or shene they would be arrested^{464 465}. William Davidson observed ‘If the government wants to target someone or sees them as a threat or holding unacceptable claims, it can say you are a member of a banned faction; the OLA or Shaane and they will be able to arrest you.’⁴⁶⁶ The Ambo University lecturers thought the use of ‘shene’ was a label that could apply to those fighting in the bush or those criticising the government, and anyone considered ‘pro-shene’ would be detained⁴⁶⁷.
- 15.1.5 The OLF officers speculated to the HO FFM team that ‘[t]he reason behind the arrests is... due to the governments fear of the OLF’s mass base deep-rooted support and hence fear of losing the election... Fear from OLF as it has broad support. By harassing they want people not to support the political parties. This is the major purpose, nothing else.’⁴⁶⁸ The OLF and OFC representatives, and Garoma B Wakessa thought the reasons behind the arrest or detention of OLF was to diminish support for opposition parties or because the OLF posed a threat to Abiy and OPD in the elections^{469 470 471}.
- 15.1.6 DFID Ethiopia staff cautioned the HO FFM team against the assessment of state targeting of OLF and Oromo. It was unlikely a person would be picked up by security forces in Oromo areas or Addis Ababa, based on being linked to OLF. The situation may be different for a person in mixed border towns, or the Somali Regional State (SRS) for example if they were OLF or Oromo where they could be picked up by local security forces⁴⁷².

⁴⁶² OLF, ‘The Intimidation and Imprisonment of the OLF...’ 19 January 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁶³ Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁴⁷¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

⁴⁷² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

15.1.7 William Davison, Crisis Group noted to the HO FFM team:

‘As a measure to widen the political space, the OLF were allowed to return in Ethiopia but the government still labels their “fighting in the bush” as illegal and therefore continue[s] to arrest the so-called insurgents for their acts of banditry. By legalising OLF, it allowed Oromo activists and oppositions to openly self-identify as the OLF. Nevertheless, it is still hard to distinguish who and what the OLF is. Despite legalising the organisation, the perception of a threat is still present and the Oromo Democratic Party, the ruling Oromo party, is seen as the oppressor by some OLF supporters.’⁴⁷³

15.1.8 In the HO FFM report, the OLF officers noted the military wing of the OLF were still in the bush and were considered a paramilitary group. The source opined that the government arrested OLF members engaged in peaceful struggle as they could or did not differentiate between the paramilitary in the bush, and the OLF in the political space⁴⁷⁴. The Life and Peace Institute noted: ‘It is difficult for the government to identify OLF in combat, supporters, activists and maybe that’s why civilian casualties. There is no clear definition between members, fighters and supporters.’⁴⁷⁵

15.1.9 In the HO FFM report, the senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted the charging of OLF Shene in the west Wollega region under the ATP law the week prior to meeting with the FFT [i.e. in mid-September 2019]⁴⁷⁶. One of the OLF officers stated that he had been arrested and detained with a friend and was unable to participate in the New Year’s Day event. The source noted ‘In addition, our members are randomly picked [up] from everywhere and put into prison.’⁴⁷⁷ The Ambo university lecturers noted a lack of due process and gave as an example, that the head of the intelligence sector for the OLF had been detained for 10 months without being taken to court⁴⁷⁸.

15.1.10 In the HO FFM report, William Davidson noted that ‘We are hearing reports filtering through of thousands of journalists, activists and protesters being arrested in Oromia.’⁴⁷⁹ The legal expert noted ‘... now you go to Oromia region and you get hundreds, or thousands arrested’, adding ‘in Oromia region, they do this mass arrests. The people are required to sign something that doesn’t really have any value. This has as much to do with much interaction between the regional Govt. and the Federal Govt. In the Oromia region, it is going up too because of the OLF.’⁴⁸⁰

15.1.11 Amnesty International (AI) in the May 2020 report, published research from interviews with two sources in November and December 2019 which noted: ‘On 18 October 2019, members of the EDF soldiers shot and killed cousins Chedecha Mi’esa Halalkie, 42, and Abdullahi Golu Halalkie, 15, along with their relative Qanqae Utura Shure, 16, after taking them out of their cells in

⁴⁷³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Life and Peace Institute, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - William Davison, Crisis Group, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Legal expert and active critic, [url](#)

Raro Kebele, in Goro Dola District of East Guji Zone. All of the detainees in detention were suspected of supporting OLA operating in the area.’⁴⁸¹

15.1.12 The HRW report 2020, covering events of 2019 noted: ‘While there have been fewer reports of arbitrary arrests overall, there have been ongoing reports of abusive arrests of alleged Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) members and their alleged sympathizers in areas of Oromia where there has been fighting between suspected members of the previously banned OLF and the military.’⁴⁸²

15.1.13 The Addis Standard in its report ‘Failed Politics and Deception: Behind the Crisis in western and southern Oromia’, 20 March 2020 noted:

‘Despite OLA’s decision in April [2019] to cut ties with OLF, close to one thousand fighters who were still armed and were operating in various parts of the country, particularly in western and southern Oromia, adhered to the ceasefire and used the 20 days deadline to make their way to state rehabilitation camps where they were promised an amnesty and a fresh start after training. As per agreements reached with the intervention of community elders, former fighters would be assessed over their eligibility to join one of several state security agencies. OLA membership dwindled as a significant numbers of its members traded their camouflage for the blue uniform of the Oromia regional state police.

‘Almost immediately, reports of returnee fighters being singled out for arrest, and beatings started making the rounds. Fighters who successfully completed the rehabilitation program were promised a fresh start, but instead a number of them were rounded up and sent to detention centers. OLF leaders, including Dawud himself cried foul when they were prevented, at least on one occasion, from visiting a rehabilitation camp at Ardaita in the Arsi zone.

‘OLF supporters on the campaign trail have been arrested, beaten and threatened by state security forces over the past few months. Amnesty International reported that at least 75 OLF supporters had been arrested last month [January 2020⁴⁸³], with most of them rounded up while peacefully attending various OLF campaign functions.’⁴⁸⁴

15.1.14 Ethiopia Insight in ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion’, 14 February 2020 noted:

‘Laetitia Bader, Human Rights Watch Africa Division Senior Researcher, said in a January 14 [2020] Ethiopia Insight interview she has been receiving reports of numerous “abusive arrests” of alleged OLA members and has also documented a handful of reprisals against relatives of individuals with alleged links to OLA fighters. “This region [West Oromia] is under an informal state of emergency, under federal military command, and has been the site of fighting between suspected members of the OLA and the military.” She

⁴⁸¹ AI, ‘Beyond Law Enforcement’... (Section 5.1), 29 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸² HRW, ‘World Report 2020 – Ethiopia’ (Arbitrary Detention...), 14 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸³ AI, ‘Ethiopia: Authorities crack down on opposition supporters ...’ 27 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ Addis Standard ‘Failed Politics and Deception...’, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

added that residents have told HRW they face restrictions on movement due to 6pm to 6am curfews. ...

'The OLF, a registered party that plans to compete in upcoming national and regional elections, complains about continuing state repression and being unable to engage in political activity in areas under Command Post rule. Executive Committee member Mikael Boran told Ethiopia Insight on January 13 that since July last year, more than 10,000 members were arrested and, for example, 42 of those detained in "dark rooms" in Kumsa Moroda Palace Museum, with over 600 imprisoned in Gimbi at military camps. He said that over 140 OLF officials, members, and supporters are held in Kaliti and Kilinto prisons and Addis Ababa's "sostegna" police station. Around 350 OLF members were arrested this week, mostly in Oromia towns near Addis Ababa, Mikael said today.

'UK-based advocates Oromia Support Group (OSG) reported on December 13 [2019] that there have been 64 extra-judicial killings and the arbitrary detention of over 1,400 Oromo in the past six months, with most of them suspected OLF supporters. A local official acting as Nekemte mayor said public services are suffering as many government workers are detained by the Command Post, including the mayor.'⁴⁸⁵

15.1.15 AI in 'Police must account for missing Oromo opposition leader', 3 March 2020 stated: 'The police must account for the whereabouts of Abdi Regassa - a senior member of the opposition political party Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) – who remains missing after security officers in Addis Ababa broke into his home and arrested him alongside eight other party members on 29 February [2020]'.⁴⁸⁶

15.1.16 In relation to the same incident, the Addis Standard, in the report 'Unlawful arrests reminiscent of Ethiopia's unchanged politics: OLF Chairman' 6 March 2020 noted:

'The chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Dawud Ibsa, has told Addis Standard that he was deeply disappointed with the security forces' recent arrests of nine OLF party members and leaders. The group were rounded up on 29 February [2020] from a gathering at a house in Addis Ababa.

'While eight [members] of the group were released the next day, one of them, Abdi Regasa, a former commander of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) [armed wing of OLF] who is one of the ex-rebels who returned to Ethiopia in 2018 and subsequently became a member of OLF's Executive Committee, remains in prison, and the police are denying that he is even in their custody...

"Security forces broke into the homes of these nine members and searched their houses," reads part of the statement sent to Addis Standard by the OLF's youth wing head, Lami Begna. "Note that the police had neither legal

⁴⁸⁵ Ethiopia Insight, 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...', 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ AI, 'Police must account for missing Oromo opposition leader', 3 March 2020, [url](#)

authority nor a court warrant to search these homes or to arrest any of them.”...

‘On 19 February, OLF released dozens of names of its supporters and members who are in police custody.’⁴⁸⁷

15.1.17 AI in ‘Urgent Action: Politicians and journalists detained’, 14 April 2020 noted:

‘On 7 March [2020], politicians Batir Filae, Gada Gabisa, Bilisuma Ararsa and Oromo News Network (ONN) journalists Desu Dula and Wago Nole were arrested near Burayu, central Ethiopia, immediately after visiting Abdi Regassa, former Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leader. A police officer stopped their car as they were returning from their visit, alleging that they had taken photos when they visited Abdi Regassa. When the police stopped them, the driver stopped the car abruptly, causing another car to hit them. The police charged and detained all five for causing the accident. In a court hearing on 31 March, the charge was dropped. However, all five remain in detention. All except Gada Gabisa have been denied access to their lawyer.’⁴⁸⁸

15.1.18 The AI May 2020 report noted:

‘Members of the kebele militia, Oromia Police and the EDF conducted a series of mass arrests in East and West Guji. While the government officials did not bring formal charges against any of the former detainees, Amnesty International interviewed for this research, the security forces told all of them they were suspected of supporting, sharing information with and feeding the OLA fighters, the splinter armed group from the military wing of the OLF. Many of the mass arrests lasted for months without access to lawyers or judicial remedies. The arbitrary arrest and detention impacted the livelihood of families, children’s education, and the integrity of families.’⁴⁸⁹

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15.2 Military training/rehabilitation camps

15.2.1 In the HO FFM report of a mission in September 2019 a number of sources informed the FFT that there were military training/rehabilitation camps or detention centres containing political prisoners in Ethiopia particularly in Oromia, the main one being Sankele^{490 491 492 493 494}. Sources noted the absence of due process for those detained in military camps including arrest without charge, delays in or failure to take detainees to court, and a lack of access to family or lawyers^{495 496 497}.

⁴⁸⁷ Addis Standard, ‘Unlawful arrests ...’, 06 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁸ AI, ‘Urgent Action: Politicians and journalists detained’, 14 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ AI, ‘Beyond Law Enforcement’... (Executive Summary), 29 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴⁹¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁴⁹² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

⁴⁹³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

- 15.2.2 The Addis Standard in its report 'Failed Politics and Deception: Behind the Crisis in western and southern Oromia' noted that in April 2019:
- '150 former OLF fighters, who had been encamped at a government rehabilitation site, were sent to a hospital in the town of Wolliso to be treated for food poisoning. News of the bizarre incident was followed by testimony of fighters and their relatives who took to social media to report of squalid conditions in camps, including lack of sanitation and of food. It also emerged that for some of the rebels, the "rehabilitation" program felt more like detention, as their stays went on for months without ever being told when they'd leave. Some likely regretted their decision to leave the OLA. Later, some of these former fighters were reported to have gone on a hunger strike to protest the lack of maintenance at these facilities.'⁴⁹⁸
- 15.2.3 Ethiopia Insight in 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion', 14 February 2020 noted:
- '...at Senkelle, some of whom are disabled, have faced an ordeal. They said prisoners were physically and verbally abused, under fed, and denied adequate medical treatment. For example, a 14-year-old boy, Obsa Zewde, who was shot in his leg with a semi-automatic rifle, was denied treatment and so had his limb amputated. Detainees said they are forced to do onerous exercises and beaten. Women were not provided with sanitation materials and at least one... is said to have had a miscarriage.'⁴⁹⁹
- 15.2.4 In the HO FFM report, Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted in relation to releases after mass arrests and detention in rehabilitation camps, prisoners were given papers to sign to not be involved in political opposition parties or not to challenge the constitutional order⁵⁰⁰.
- 15.2.5 In the HO FFM report, the senior representative from OFC noted:
- 'The OLF, who are being held in military training camps or police stations, come from across Oromia... The purpose of holding them is probably to do with the upcoming elections, the government wants to weaken the political opposition. A good tactic is to detain some political opposition, harass and then release them. People can be released after being recruited into the ruling party or agreeing to become informants. People who are being released have told us this. The people who are arrested tend to be younger and not involved in the previous regime's arrests and detentions. Another argument is that the government does not have enough support in Oromia, despite being Oromo himself, Abiy lacks the necessary support, so the police are arresting Oromos as a deterrence.'⁵⁰¹
- 15.2.6 In the HO FFM report a number of sources commented that there had been large numbers of arrests in Oromia, but the estimated numbers varied considerably. A number of sources did not explicitly state the numbers related to the OLF, although others did. Additionally, the period that the

⁴⁹⁸ Addis Standard 'Failed Politics and Deception...', 20 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Ethiopia Insight, 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...', 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

sources were talking about was often unclear⁵⁰². The Horn of Africa researcher noted reports of approximately two hundred people arrested and detained in Oromia for rehabilitation. They were released after a few months⁵⁰³. The Ambo University lecturers opined the number was 5,000 qeerroos, scholars, professors and medical teachers⁵⁰⁴. One of the NaMA leaders noted 6,000 Oromos reportedly detained in Sankele military camp by ODP⁵⁰⁵.

- 15.2.7 In the HO FFM report, the senior representative of the OFC considered: 'Across Oromia there are a lot of prisoners, 120km from here, 6,000 new political prisoners are facing all kinds of ordeals, the government and local authorities are not following due process and taking them to the court, sometimes for days, weeks, months.'⁵⁰⁶ Garoma B Wakessa, however, observed: 'At this moment we know over 20,000 Oromos are in concentration camps and police station in different zones of Oromia Regional state. These were mostly men and young people pregnant women, family members and couples. These people are still suffering in Sankele in Ambo town and Tolay located in western part of Oromia near to Tulu Bolo town and other concentration camps.' The source also stated that there were either 4,001 or 5,000 prisoners in Sankele military camp. When asked where he obtained the 20,000 figure the source claimed he obtained this information from a prisoner when he visited Sankele camp who told him that there were 4,001 prisoners in Sankele itself⁵⁰⁷.
- 15.2.8 In the HO FFM report, the OLF officers claimed that '[a]lmost 20,000 OLF members were arrested and put into Sankele and Tolay military camps and other concentration camps where they are forced to stay one to 4 four months without any court charge.' The source also stated 'We haven't got an exact idea [of how many have been detained] as they can detain and release people anywhere. But nearly 30,000 of our members were arrested and released. About 6,000 members and supporters are in prison, both in Sankele military camp and other district police station. Two of our central committee are arrested right now and many other zonal representatives in Addis Ababa police station 3 adjacent [to the] notorious central prison.'⁵⁰⁸
- 15.2.9 In the HO FFM report, the OLF officers claimed: 'The government release one batch of prisoners from the camp who are then rearrest another batch; some are rearrested for 4-5 times again and again and taken to the military camp. It is very frustrating and a vicious cycle. Today 79 people released from both Sankele and Tolay military camps and dumped in the city, they have no transportation and no money to get home. They were given no official paper to say they have been released. This is

⁵⁰² Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020 (para 9.5.11), [url](#)

⁵⁰³ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D – Horn of Africa researcher, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁴ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁵ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - One of the NaMA leaders, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Senior representative of OFC, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁸ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

mainly what happened in the Sankele detention camp. In the very remote areas people are being randomly detained and then asked for money, harassed of being shane [Shene] and get arrested, they are forced to pay upto 10,000 birr to be released with legal receipt for the money. This is a form of economic exploitation.⁵⁰⁹

15.2.10 In the HO FFM report, the Political section, British Embassy, however, noted with regard to mass arrests:

‘A lot of rumours fly around, usually with incendiary language to try to grab attention. No evidence of this. But undoubtedly the picture in Oromia remains challenging. A lot of things are going on, there is general infighting between OLF factions and youth groups, land issues going on, spilt from the Ethiopian church, push for nationalism and power and it all feels quite aggressive and something we need to watch.’⁵¹⁰

15.2.11 Also in the HO FFM report, Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, opined that some reports of arrests and detention on the basis of political opinion in military camps in Oromia were true. The source noted, however, that having rehabilitation centres to educate or indoctrinate rather than press criminal charges was the practice of the previous administration. The source thought that although cases happen these are not in the large numbers as alleged⁵¹¹.

15.2.12 In relation to the profile and type of people detained as documented in the HO FFM report, the OLF officers noted that ‘...the detainees in sankele are OLF supporters, members, committee members, central committee members and even OLF affiliated non-members.’ The same source added that they were mostly young qeerroo in the camp. In relation to who was responsible for these arrests and detentions, the OLF officers stated that OLF members have been arrested without charge by the intelligence sector or the military⁵¹². Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA stated those detaining people in military camps were central government police and Special Oromo Forces⁵¹³.

15.2.13 In the same HO FFM report, the OLF officers opined a cyclical nature of arrest and release. On the day the FFT met with the source (19 September 2019), they noted the release of 79 people from both Sankele and Tolay military camps who were deposited in the city, without transportation or money to return home. They were not given official papers of release⁵¹⁴.

15.2.14 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘In August the OLF claimed security forces had arrested an unknown number of its leaders, members, and supporters in Oromia and only released some after they had undergone “political retraining.”

⁵⁰⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁵¹⁰ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Political section, British Embassy, [url](#)

⁵¹¹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

⁵¹² Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

⁵¹³ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D – Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, [url](#)

⁵¹⁴ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - OLF officers, [url](#)

'In September 2018 Addis Ababa city police detained 1,204 youths whom they suspected had a connection with the violence that occurred following the return of the OLF in Burayu. Police detained the youths at the Tolay Military training camp and provided them with a month of "re-education." On October 18 [2019], police released 1,174 detainees. By year's end [2019] the government did not report the status of the remaining 30 youth that police detained.'⁵¹⁵

15.2.15 Amnesty International in 'Ethiopia: Authorities crack down on opposition supporters with mass arrests' 27 January 2020 noted:

'Amnesty International has confirmed that at least 75 supporters of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) were arrested over the weekend from various places in different parts of Oromia Regional State, as Ethiopian authorities intensify the crackdown on dissenting political views ahead of the general elections. ... Arrests took place across the state including in Finchawa town in West Guji Zone of Oromia, and Shambu town in Horo-Gudururu Wallaga Zone of Oromia. Among those arrested was Chaltu Takele, a prominent political activist...

'The weekend arrests are the latest in a long line of mass arrests of opposition activists. The Ethiopian police and military have been rounding up people for "rehabilitation training" since February 2019. After spending time in various military and police detention centres, most were released between September and November 2019.'⁵¹⁶

15.2.16 Ethiopia Insight in 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion', 14 February 2020 noted:

'In the past six months alone, at least 5,000 Oromo from all over the region—but mainly from the four Wellega zones, both Guji zones, Borena Zone, Burayu town, and some from Oromia Special Zone in Amhara—were detained in Senkelle Police College near Ambo, according to Ijara and other former detainees who did not wish to be identified. Ages ranged from thirteen to 76, these victims told Ethiopia Insight. Students, farmers, civil servants, drivers, religious leaders, Abbaa Gadaas (Oromo elders), traders, and others are among those held at Senkelle, a police training camp used as a detention and indoctrination facility, they said...

"It is difficult and costly for the government to go through legal procedure" because of the large numbers of people detained and instead "training" on the constitution is given to detainees who otherwise could be imprisoned for at least one year, said spokesman Taye. He said more than 1,000 people were held in Senkelle but only those being prosecuted remain.'⁵¹⁷

15.2.17 The same report noted:

'Human Rights Commissioner Daniel Bekele said the watchdog was monitoring detentions. "Parts of western Wellega is an area of an active military operation and we are following up reports of extended detentions in

⁵¹⁵ USSD, 'USSD report 2019' (section 1.d), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹⁶ Amnesty International, 'Ethiopia: Authorities crack down ...', 27 January 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹⁷ Ethiopia Insight, 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...', 14 February 2020, [url](#)

police stations and other unofficial places of detention such as military bases without due process of law,” he told Ethiopia Insight. “We understand that the military has handed over several detainees to the police but the authorities have not yet completed investigations and pressed charges, resulting in quite extended detentions without a legal due process”.⁵¹⁸

15.2.18 And:

‘...Ethiopian human rights groups, have detailed a pattern of mass detentions and government abuses, and a group of Oromo academics has also spoken out about continuing repression. Officials have acknowledged applying much-criticised tactics of previous governments: cutting the internet and phone lines as part of security operations and the use of mass detentions followed by indoctrination efforts.

‘Abiy told parliament on February 3 [2020] that due to a security operation there has been a complete telecommunications blackout in Western Wellega and Kellem Wellega zones and partial shutdown in Eastern and Horo Guduru Wellega zones. Since early January, there have been reports of increased violence in western Oromia where the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), formerly the armed wing of the OLF, has been active. A federal “Command Post” has taken over security management from regional authorities in the area since October 2018. The Command Post manages a de facto state of emergency, introducing curfews, prohibiting gatherings, and authorising detentions without routine due process.’⁵¹⁹

15.2.19 The AI May 2020 report noted:

‘The command post in the two Guji zones conducted multiple arbitrary arrests and detention of people suspected of supporting OLA and OLF. While some were subjected to repeated arrests, thousands of people underwent protracted detention in local police stations in West and East Guji zones. The command posts transported thousands of detainees from all over Oromia to Tolay Military Training Camp, where the detainees were forced to undergo compulsory training on rule of law, constitutionalism, and the history of the Oromo struggle. Beside the training, the detainees were required to make incriminating statements during group sessions. Those who refused to confess wrongdoing were transferred to Sanqale Oromia Police College, where at least 2,000 detainees were held for months. Detention conditions at Sanqale were particularly punitive due to shortage of food and lack of beddings, as well as use of torture and other ill treatment. Detainees were locked up all day apart from allowed period of ten minutes in the mornings and evenings.’⁵²⁰

See also [Oromo Liberation Army \(OLA\)/OLF fighters](#) and [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#) and [Treatment of detainees/prison conditions](#)

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Section 16 updated: 13 April 2020

⁵¹⁸ Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹⁹ Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵²⁰ AI, ‘Beyond Law Enforcement... (Executive Summary), 29 May 2020, [url](#)

16. Freedom of expression and assembly

16.1 General

16.1.1 The Freedom House report 2020 noted:

‘Wide-reaching surveillance programs and the presence of the EPRDF at all levels of society have inhibited private discussion. However, broad political changes starting in 2018, including the release of political prisoners and lifting of bans against prominent government critics in the media and other sectors, has fostered a more open atmosphere for free expression among ordinary people.’⁵²¹

16.1.2 HRW report 2019, covering events in 2018, noted ‘Many of Ethiopia’s repressive laws used to silence dissent and restrict citizens’ meaningful engagement—including the Charities and Societies Proclamation, the Media Law, and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation—were being revised at time of writing.’⁵²²

16.1.3 The USSD report 2019 noted:

‘The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly. On March 24, however, a group of youth in Bahir Dar interrupted a town hall meeting organized by the PG7. The youths reportedly forced their way into the meeting hall, took down banners with slogans of the party, and replaced them with their own messages. Government security forces did not stop the youths.

‘Authorities could not refuse to grant a permit for an event but could require changing the location or time for reasons of public safety or freedom of movement...

‘The EPRDF used its own conference centers and government facilities in Addis Ababa and the regional capitals for meetings and events.

‘The Baladeras Council, led by activist and journalist Eskinder Nega, canceled four planned public meetings over a period of three months....

‘Eskinder canceled a protest scheduled for October 13 to voice opposition to the backsliding of democracy in the country. The move to cancel the protest came after the Addis Ababa Police issued a statement on October 12 banning the gathering. Police also temporarily detained the protest’s coordinators. Eskinder told local media that his group submitted a notification letter to the city administration two weeks in advance of the planned protest.’⁵²³

16.1.4 The Freedom house report 2020 noted:

‘The ruling EPRDF government has repeatedly restricted freedom of assembly, including through the use of deadly force to break up demonstrations... Restrictions have eased somewhat since the most recent state of emergency ended in June 2018... In October 2019, hundreds of

⁵²¹ Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia’ (D.4) 4 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵²² HRW, ‘HRW report 2019’ (Freedom of Expression), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

⁵²³ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (section 2.b), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

thousands of people including vocal opposition leaders attended an Irreecha celebration (the Oromo thanksgiving) in Addis Ababa; it was the first time city authorities allowed the festivities in the country's capital.

'However, freedom of assembly is still regularly restricted. In March 2019, a planned press conference by the Balderas Council [a political movement started by journalist Eskinder Nega] was disrupted by local police after being prohibited by the government. In October, a planned demonstration by the same group was cancelled after being prohibited, and several organizers were arrested. Clashes between protestors and local security forces also took place in 2019, including in Bahir Dar, Gondar, and Hawassa.' ⁵²⁴

- 16.1.5 For information on media freedom to operate and the treatment of journalists and bloggers see [Ethiopia: Background note](#)

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16.2 Protests

- 16.2.1 The UN Human Rights Council noted in March 2019 'The United Nations country team expressed concern about reports that people participating in nationwide protests and demonstrations had been injured or killed by law enforcement and security forces. It was concerned by the lack of concrete measures to hold law enforcement and security forces accountable for those acts.' ⁵²⁵

- 16.2.2 The Amnesty International annual report 'Ethiopia 2019' published 8 April 2020 noted:

'In January [2019], members of the Ethiopian Defense Forces unlawfully killed at least nine protesters, including three children, in the towns of Genda-Wuha and Kokit, in the Amhara Region. The army was escorting a convoy of vehicles, ostensibly carrying construction machinery, but which protesters believed was being used to traffic weapons and ammunition. When the townspeople blocked the road that traversed the two towns, in order to search the vehicles, the army shot at them. Witnesses told Amnesty International that the protesters did not use any violence means during the standoff during the blockade. Although, in January the army's Deputy Chief of Staff promised to investigate the incident, no findings had been made public by the end of the year and no prosecutions were initiated.' ⁵²⁶

- 16.2.3 In the HO FFM report documenting interviews undertaken in September 2019, the Ambo University lecturers noted: 'People now have the right to demonstrate, which was previously denied by the government. There were arrests of the younger generation (Qeerroo). Now, people such as Qeerroo equivalents for Amhara and Sidama have the necessary certification and the right to demonstrate. This was a big change in Ethiopia for the better.' ⁵²⁷

- 16.2.4 In the HO FFM report, DFID Ethiopia staff noted that generally, although protests could be prohibited in certain areas, the feeling of state control over protests, and violence committed by security forces had decreased. The

⁵²⁴ Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia' (section E.1) 4 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵²⁵ UN Human Rights Council, 'Compilation on Ethiopia' (para 18), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

⁵²⁶ AI, 'Ethiopia 2019' (Unlawful killings), 8 April 2020, [url](#)

⁵²⁷ Home Office, 'HO FFM report', February 2020, Annex D - Ambo University lecturers, [url](#)

same source also noted the increase in the number of peaceful demonstrations although also stated they could still be mixed:

‘There are protests in regions, they are not protesting against one government but Oromos.

‘But violence by the state security forces has decreased and there has been an increase in peaceful demos against each other, for example ethnic groups. Protests are prohibited in certain areas. A lot of the protests are mixed. Some demonstrations are more riots than demonstrations. The feeling of control by state in general is less... The biggest protest was and are in Oromia where Abiy is from. There is a huge decrease in protests in Oromia now because they got what they wanted.’⁵²⁸.

16.2.5 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, stated there had been examples of arbitrary arrests, linked to demonstrations⁵²⁹.

16.2.6 The USSD report 2019 noted: ‘According to reports, there was a buildup of security forces, both uniformed and plainclothes, embedded on university campuses in anticipation of student protests, especially in Oromia, in response to student demonstrations.’⁵³⁰

16.2.7 The HRW report 2020 noted:

‘Violence on July 18 in Awassa, capital of [Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region] SNNPR, between protesters demanding a vote [referendum to secede from SNNPR] and security forces, followed by reported violence against non-Sidama residents of the region, resulted in the deaths of 53 people according to a zonal police official, the displacement of hundreds, and significant property damage. The SNNPR region was then placed under federal security control.

‘Protests that broke out in Addis Ababa on October 23, following allegations by Jawar Mohammed that the government was removing his security detail, and then spread to many parts of the Oromia region, were met on occasion by excessive use of lethal force by the security forces, notably in Ambo town. The protests devolved rapidly into communal violence in several towns. The government said the unrest resulted in 86 deaths, 10 the result of “confrontations” with security forces.’⁵³¹

16.2.8 The AI annual report ‘Ethiopia 2019’ published 8 April 2020 noted: ‘In October [2019], the security forces killed at least 12 protesters in Ambo and Adama towns during protests against a government decision to withdraw protection from an Oromo political activist [Jawar Mohammed].’⁵³²

16.2.9 ACLED in ‘Regional Overview: Africa 20 – 26 October 2019’, 30 October 2019 noted:

‘Rioting in the Oromia region of Ethiopia was lethal. Following social media reports by popular activist Jawar Mohamad that security forces were lifting

⁵²⁸ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - DFID Ethiopia staff, [url](#)

⁵²⁹ Home Office, ‘HO FFM report’, February 2020, Annex D - Wondemagegn Goshu, [url](#)

⁵³⁰ USSD, ‘USSD report 2019’ (section 2), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵³¹ HRW, ‘World Report 2020 – Ethiopia’, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

⁵³² AI, ‘Ethiopia 2019’ (Unlawful killings), 8 April 2020, [url](#)

his protections, supporters mobilized, triggering rioting that killed 67 people over three days. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed affirms that the majority of deaths were due to rioters' violence and not a product of security force intervention. Particularly concerning is the ethnic and religious dimensions that emerged as the riots intensified spread. By the end of the week, homes, churches, and mosques had been burned in the disturbances.'⁵³³

16.2.10 Al Jazeera on 31 October 2019 noted:

'At least 78 people were killed in protests in Ethiopia last week against the treatment of a highly influential activist and media entrepreneur, a spokeswoman for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has said.

'Billene Seyoum told a news conference on Thursday that those killed had died in a "very senseless act of violence" in the Oromia and Harari regions, and in the eastern city of Dire Dawa. ... 409 people had been arrested over the unrest, which erupted in the capital, Addis Ababa, and in Oromia on October 23 after Jawar Mohammed, a prominent activist and founder of the Oromia Media Network, accused security forces of trying to orchestrate an attack against him. Police denied his claim.

'She added that investigations were ongoing and both the death toll and number detained could rise.'⁵³⁴

16.2.11 International Crisis Group in 'Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails', 16 December 2019 noted:

'The most recent bout of turmoil began on October 23 after Jawar Mohammed, a prominent Oromo activist and media owner, accused the government on Facebook of stripping him of his security detail in an attempt to facilitate his assassination. After the Facebook post, hundreds of protesters gathered outside Jawar's home in the capital to defend him and thousands took to the streets across Oromia. Demonstrations in the region in 2015-2018 had taken place mostly in rural areas; this time, protests shook some of Oromia's multi-ethnic towns and cities. They led to death and destruction as other groups rallied in response and confrontations triggered violence. Security forces shot ten protesters dead, while losing five from their own ranks. Oromo youth groups, or Qeerroo, played a major role in the bloodshed, in some cases instigating attacks against other groups, as well as fellow Oromos deemed to display insufficient ethnic solidarity, and in other instances retaliating after provocations.'⁵³⁵

16.2.12 Ethiopia Insight in 'Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into chaos and confusion', 14 February 2020 noted:

'Students in several universities and people in other parts of Oromia rallied on January 9 and 10, protesting against Command Post rule in western and southern Oromia and the blackout.

In reaction to the protest, 77 Oromo students at Haramaya University, of which 68 are from Wellega, were dismissed by the university for vandalism

⁵³³ ACLED, 'Regional Overview: Africa 20-26 October', 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵³⁴ Al Jazeera, 'Ethiopia says 78 killed in protests against treatment of activist', 31 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵³⁵ ICG, 'Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails' (section II), 16 December 2019, [url](#)

on January 11 and taken to Addis Ababa by security forces where they were dropped on the roadside. In addition, security forces shot dead a protester and injured 10 at Bule Hora University in West Guji on January 9.’⁵³⁶

16.2.13 Ethiopian Monitor in the January 2020 article ‘Mass Protests over Abducted Students’ noted:

‘Demonstrations have taken place across northern Ethiopia about the failure of the authorities to find a group of 27 students abducted 50 days ago. The students – from the Amhara community – were kidnapped as they fled an outbreak of ethnic violence at Dembi Dolo University in the Oromia region. It is not clear who is behind the abduction of the students, believed to be mainly young women, but local officials say armed men are active in the area. Tens of thousands took to the streets on Tuesday across the northern Amhara region, following an intensive social media campaign. They chanted anti-government slogans, accusing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of not doing enough to secure the students’ release. It comes more than two weeks after the authorities said they had secured the release of 21 students, but their families say nothing has been heard from them.’⁵³⁷

16.2.14 In relation to the same incident the New York Times noted:

‘Ethiopians are taking to the streets and to social media to protest their government’s failure to find at least a dozen university students and five other people who were believed to have been kidnapped from a bus by masked men in December in the latest in a chain of ethnically driven conflicts. ...

‘The abduction of the students comes after a number of deadly clashes on Ethiopian campuses in recent months. In November, the government confirmed the death of three students — two students at Woldia University in Amhara region and one at Dembi Dolo University. In December, the government deployed federal police to universities in an attempt to calm ethnic tensions. ...

‘Those protesting the students’ kidnappings have faced reprisals, according to Laetitia Bader, a senior researcher in the Africa division of Human Rights Watch. Three leaders of the Amhara Students Association, a national body representing ethnic Amharas, were detained this week in the capital, Addis Ababa, and questioned for several hours about their plans to protest, Ms. Bader said.’⁵³⁸

For more information on violence in Sidama and the referendum see Al Jazeera [‘Ethiopia: At least 17 killed in violence over Sidama autonomy’](#)⁵³⁹, BBC, [‘Ethiopia referendum: Sidama poll could test Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’](#)⁵⁴⁰ and [Deutsche Welle ‘Ethiopia's Sidama vote overwhelmingly for autonomy’](#)⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁶ Ethiopia Insight, ‘Amid blackout, western Oromia plunges deeper into ...’, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁷ Ethiopian Monitor, ‘Mass Protests over Abducted Students’, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ New York Times, ‘Abduction of Ethiopian Students Fuels Anger...’, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁹ Al Jazeera, ‘Ethiopia: At least 17 killed in violence over Sidama autonomy’, 20 July 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ BBC, ‘Ethiopia referendum: Sidama poll ...’, 20 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁴¹ DW ‘Ethiopia's Sidama vote overwhelmingly for autonomy’ 22 November 2020, [url](#)

See also [State of emergency, Treatment of detainees/prison conditions](#)

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Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- The political landscape
 - Resignation of Hailemariam Desalegn and replacement with Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister
 - Early reform
 - Assassinations and attempted coup
 - Change in pace of reform process
 - Ruling party -PP/ Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
 - opposition parties
- Treatment of opposition groups generally
 - Discrimination and harassment
 - Arrest and detention
 - ATP
 - Detainees/prison conditions
 - Liyu police and SRS
 - Students and youths
- Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)
 - History
 - Aims
 - Size, membership and leadership
 - Registration/ability to function
 - Qeerroo
 - Arrest and detention
- OLA
 - Size, membership and leadership
 - Return and reintegration of fighters
 - Violence
 - Shene
 - Arrest and detention
- Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

- Ginbot 7 (G7)/Arbegnoch (Patriot) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement (AGUDM)
 - dissolution
- Non-armed opposition groups
 - Main opposition parties
 - New parties
 - Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia (Medrek)
 - Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ)/Andinet
 - Ethiopian Democratic Party
 - All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP)
 - Semayawi (Blue) Party
 - OFC
 - E-ZEMA
- Freedom of expression and assembly
 - Overview
 - Protests

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **4.0**
- valid from **15 July 2020**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment.

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