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Home Office

# **Report of a Home Office Fact-Finding Mission Ethiopia: The political situation**

**Conducted 16 September 2019 to 20 September 2019**

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# Introduction

This document provides information obtained from the Home Office's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to Ethiopia. It does **not** provide advice on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. For this, see the Ethiopia Country Policy and Information Notes on the [GOV.UK website](#).

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## Background

The FFM was conducted in Ethiopia between 16 and 20 September 2019 by 3 officials from the Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT) with support from the British Embassy in Addis Ababa. The team was based in Addis Ababa and visited Ambo in Oromia.

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## Purpose of the mission

The purpose of the mission was to gather accurate and up-to-date information from a range of sources about the political situation since April 2018 and the changes that have occurred under the new prime minister, Dr Abiy Ahmed. A full Terms of Reference (ToR) is available at [Annex A](#).

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## Report's structure

The report is split into:

- An executive summary
- A thematically arranged narrative, combining paraphrasing of and direct quotes from the source notes, reflecting the ToR; and
- Annexes.

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# Methodology

The FFM was undertaken with reference to the [EU \[European Union\] common guidelines on \(Joint\) Fact Finding Missions: a practical tool to assist member states in organizing \(joint\) Fact Finding Missions](#), November 2010 (EU Guidelines 2010).

## Identification of sources

The Home Office Fact-finding Team (FFT) sought to interview a wide range of sources. In identifying interlocutors, the FFT consulted with Foreign and Commonwealth staff at the British Embassy in Addis Ababa, conducted research on relevant and valuable potential sources and consulted a [professor of development studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies](#) with country expertise on Somalia and Ethiopia. The sources contacted and interviewed represent the sources that the FFT were able to identify as relevant to the mission. But, as with any fact-finding mission, factors including time constraints and availability meant that the list of sources consulted, and information provided are not exhaustive.

A list of sources interviewed is at [Annex B](#).

Ethiopia is a complex and diverse country which is in the process of going through fundamental change. The FFT tried to reflect this diversity by interviewing a wide range of sources from political groups (including representatives of formerly proscribed terrorist organisations), journalists, academics, British government officials and non-government organisations. The sources provided different perspectives and information about the political and human rights situation, some of which was not consistent across sources interviewed.

That a particular source was interviewed, and the notes of that interview included should not be considered as the Home Office's endorsement of that source or the information provided. Rather, all sources and information provided need to be critically assessed and considered against other publicly available material.

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## Arranging and conducting interviews

The FFT met with 27 people during 17 face-to-face interviews.

Additionally, there was one meeting held via Skype before the mission with the Horn of Africa researcher and one after, with William Davison via telephone.

At the start of each interview the FFT explained the purpose of the mission and stated that the notes of the meeting may be published in a report and that the sources would be able to review their notes before publication.

A copy of the introductory explanation can be found at [Annex C](#).

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## Notes of interviews/meetings

The FFT made notes of meetings which were then sent by email to the sources for review and approval. Fifteen sets of notes are annexed to the report. Thirteen sources approved the notes, with a number making amendments to the original drafts. Two sources; the Life and Peace Institute and the senior representatives of Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (E-ZEMA) did not respond to requests for agreement of the notes. DFID Ethiopia staff approved the notes taken on 20 September.

Four sources; Justice for All, the Ministry of Peace, Tadesse Kenea Amentae (President, Ambo University) and Eskinder Nega (journalist and the leader of the Addis Ababa Baladera Council) were interviewed but did not want the information they provided included in the report.

All sources were asked how they would prefer to be referenced. A number of sources requested varying degrees of anonymity to protect their professional privacy or to protect their safety. In these cases, the FFT asked sources to provide a description of how they preferred to be referenced. All sources are described according to their own request where this was specifically made.

The notes of interviews with sources are available at [Annex D](#).

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# List of abbreviations

|               |                                                   |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| ARRA          | Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs           |
| ATP           | Anti-Terrorism Proclamation                       |
| CSO           | Civil Society Organisation                        |
| CPIT          | Country Policy and Information Team               |
| DFID          | Department for International Development          |
| ECHR          | European Convention on Human Rights               |
| ECtHR         | European Court of Human Rights                    |
| EHRC          | Ethiopian Human Rights Commission                 |
| EPRDF         | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front |
| ECSJ / E-ZEMA | Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice              |
| FFM           | Home Office fact-finding mission                  |
| FFT           | Home Office fact-finding team                     |
| HRLHA         | Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa         |
| IDP           | Internally displaced person                       |
| NaMA          | National Movement of Amhara                       |
| NGO           | Non-governmental organisation                     |
| ODP           | Oromo Democratic Party (formerly OPDO)            |
| OFC           | The Oromo Federalist Congress                     |
| OLA           | Oromo Liberation Army                             |
| OLF           | Oromo Liberation Front                            |
| ONLF          | Ogaden National Liberation Front                  |
| OPDO          | Oromo People Democratic Organisation              |
| PG7           | Patriotic Ginbot 7                                |
| SDP           | Somali Democratic Party                           |
| SNNP/R        | Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples region |
| SRS           | Somali Regional State                             |
| TPLF          | Tigray People's Liberation Front                  |
| UN            | United Nations                                    |

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# Executive summary

On 2 April 2018 Dr Abiy Ahmed Ali became prime minister of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. During his first few months as prime minister, he introduced a number of fundamental reforms which included: the de-proscription and return of exiled terrorist organisations – notably the Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) – and the pardoning and release of thousands of political prisoners. Reforms to the security sector were announced, including a commitment to end torture and the arbitrary use of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP).

The widening of the political space included revision of the media and civil society organisation laws, and the enacting of the electoral reform law to enable free and open national elections in 2020. Corruption and allegations of human rights abuse have been investigated, and some high-level officials have been replaced and prosecuted for past abuses. The process of holding those accountable and bringing them to justice is ongoing.

Since the initial wave of reforms and actions of Dr Abiy, the country has entered a transition period and slow-down in the reform process. This has been met with impatience and criticism by some groups. In June 2019 there was an alleged attempted coup to which the government, taken by surprise, reacted swiftly and forcefully. The ATP was used to arrest and detain hundreds of individuals, including journalists and those associated with, and members of, a range of opposition groups. While some remain in detention, many have subsequently been released.

The government retains control over federal security forces. However, the security sector reforms, which were implemented from the top down included the removal of a number of senior figures associated with the former regime. This has caused upheaval, undermining the security services' effectiveness. There was limited central government control over some regional forces due to ethnic and regional loyalties.

Political groups are largely organised along ethnic and regional lines. With the rise in political freedoms and greater freedom of expression, ethnic tension is more evident as different groups seek to have their voices heard and views represented.

Opposition groups, including former designated terrorist organisations, have been able to register as political groups. Although the experience has varied between group and regions, most are generally able to function with a significant improvement from the previous regime, notably so for ONLF and Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (E-ZEMA; the new party comprised of 7 former opposition groups including PG7). However, sources acknowledge that politically-based arrests continue, although in smaller numbers compared to the pre-Abiy governments.

There are different factions of the OLF, including an armed wing in western Oromia (also labelled 'Shene'), which has had clashes with government forces. Arrests and detentions of OLF, including 'Shene', have occurred. Several sources claim that there have been 1,000s of people arrested and detained in rehabilitation camps within Oromia, mostly for short periods of time, and subject to 're-education'. However, there is a lack of consistency amongst sources about the numbers, reasons for arrests, conditions in detention, and a lack of clarity about the time period in which the detentions occurred. Treatment and conditions in prisons have improved and generally there is no longer the use of torture.

# Synthesis of notes

## 1. Political landscape

### 1.1 Opening of political space

- 1.1.1 Most sources agreed that since Abiy Ahmed became prime minister in April 2018 there has been an opening up of the political space which had improved in comparison to the past<sup>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8</sup>.
- 1.1.2 A number of sources noted this had been manifest in positive aspects of the first phase of the reform process which has 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<sup>9 10 11 12 13</sup>.
- 1.1.3 The Life and Peace Institute stated:

‘There is a sense of optimism with the general situation. There is a big difference from last year [2018] to this year [2019]... The historical context needs to be understood, if you do not contextualise the situation... it would be difficult to appreciate the change because we started with a low political space. The reforms started within the security sector and have now spread to the civil society... The system needed to be ventilated and it imploded. In that sense it is so difficult not to appreciate the changes since April 2018.’
- 1.1.4 One of the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) leaders described the last 18 months (with Abiy Ahmed as prime minister) as a ‘very challenging and unique time for Ethiopia’<sup>14</sup>.
- 1.1.5 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University stated ‘...there are some concerns, although we have seen improvements in relative terms in my general assessment. There is no transparency with government and things have not changed in this regard... Generally, in my assessment the federal government is respecting individual rights.’<sup>15</sup>
- 1.1.6 In describing the progress made under Abiy, the Horn of Africa Researcher noted: ‘From April 2018– April/May 2019 the signs were very positive. First time in the last decade that we have seen concrete human rights steps

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<sup>1</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>3</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>5</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>9</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>13</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>14</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

taken... There was no space for political opponents until Abiy came in to power.’<sup>16</sup>

- 1.1.7 William Davidson, however, observed that the opening of the political space has meant that it is:

‘... more contested. Thanks to opening and widening the political space for electoral competition, there is greater dynamism from the opposition. Ethiopian politics is more vibrant than ever, and this is largely a positive development. Over the last decades we haven’t seen this level of political activity. There is not only a political space for party contestation, but it is a more dynamic space for ethnic and ideological demands... It has exposed and put the focus on political rifts within Ethiopia. Not just on ethnic/regional lines, but also political divisions. There are groups that fundamentally disagree on various things such as what Ethiopia’s history says about the country and the direction Ethiopia is going to.

‘As a result, there is politically driven violence, which will likely continue for the future.’<sup>17</sup>

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## 1.2 Release of political prisoners

- 1.2.1 Garoma B Wakessa, Director General of Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA), 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.’<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the Horn of Africa researcher noted that ‘[f]rom April 2018 – April/May 2019... thousands of political detainees [were] released...’<sup>19</sup>
- 1.2.2 Senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted the release of political prisoners had been ‘a very good leap in the right direction.’<sup>20</sup>
- 1.2.3 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 about it, and the number actually released may be lower than the official number of released political prisoners.’<sup>21</sup>
- 1.2.4 The Ambo University lecturers noted the release applied to various types of prisoners: ‘Political prisoners were released from different prison camps

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<sup>16</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>17</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>21</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

including prominent opposition leaders, journalists, individuals involved in the political unrest. This was a critical change for Ethiopia.’<sup>22</sup>

- 1.2.5 In addition to the release of political prisoners, the Horn of Africa researcher noted the closure of 2 prisons. The detention facility, Maekelawi, closed a few months before Abiy came into office in April 2018 and was made open to the public in September 2019<sup>23</sup>. The source noted in that prison ‘...treatment and conditions were bad and most high-profile political detainees were detained there. The closure was symbolic.’<sup>24</sup> DFID Ethiopia staff described its closure as ‘a good commitment to human rights from the government’.<sup>25</sup>
- 1.2.6 The legal expert acknowledged that there had been lots of releases, including civil society members but opined that ‘Abiy is not doing it in accordance with the law.’<sup>26</sup> The source did not elaborate on this point.

See also [Conditions on release](#) and [Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt of June 2019](#)

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### 1.3 Return of exiled groups

- 1.3.1 Several sources observed that the opening of the political space included the return of exiled groups and opposition forces<sup>27 28 29 30</sup>.
- 1.3.2 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 Liberation Front, Afar Liberation Front, prominent human rights activists, artists and scholars<sup>31</sup>.
- 1.3.3 Hassan Moalin 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 delists us as terrorists in parliament and said they were struggling for their right and the government was committing a crime against humanity.’<sup>32</sup>
- 1.3.4 One of the NaMA leaders described the decision to invite exiled opposition groups back to Ethiopia as ‘a brilliant idea, so that they can start a peaceful political engagement.’<sup>33</sup>

See also [Ogaden National Liberation Front \(ONLF\)](#), [Patriotic Ginbot 7 \(PG7\)](#) and [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#)

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<sup>22</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>25</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>28</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>29</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>33</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

## 1.4 Legal reform

- 1.4.1 Several sources 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<sup>34 35 36</sup>.
- 1.4.2 The legal expert, the senior representatives of Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (E-ZEMA) and the senior representative of Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) stated that they (or their organisation) had been involved in the legal reform consultation process<sup>37 38 39</sup>. DFID Ethiopia staff noted the process had been inclusive and that, in relation to the electoral law, it was drafted by university lecturers and independent people<sup>40</sup>.
- 1.4.3 However, the senior representative of OFC noted that when the electoral law was finalised, there were provisions not previously seen and 65 political parties did not accept it<sup>41</sup>. The senior representatives of E-ZEMA stated that not all their provisions were included, but this was to be expected and that they were happy with the law<sup>42</sup>.
- 1.4.4 In relation to progress of legal reform more generally, the senior representatives of E-ZEMA stated that although there were frustrations they were '...still hopeful that the legal reforms, such as the CSO laws, reformation of the ATP and media laws, election boards, the justice system, the setup of the human rights commission are... good ingredients for the democratic process and for a democratic state with equal rights.'<sup>43</sup>
- 1.4.5 The Horn of Africa researcher noted: 'In terms of reform, things slowed down. There were reforms in CSO law, appointment of figures who were opposition in the past. In relation to the creation of the reconciliation commission there are questions about why certain officials were appointed, they had no clear relevant experience in this area and the mandate is unclear so, so far, seems to be mainly a PR exercise.'<sup>44</sup>

See also [Civil Society and Non-government organisations \(NGOs\)](#) and [Use of Anti-Terrorism Proclamation](#) and [Scheduled national elections: May 2020](#)

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<sup>34</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>39</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>40</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>41</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>43</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>44</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

## 1.5 Change of pace in reform process

- 1.5.1 In describing the progress made under Abiy, the Horn of Africa researcher considered it ‘...a period of flux. Transition.’ suggesting there had been a slowdown in terms of reform<sup>45</sup>. A number of sources thought that after the initial positive changes, the situation in 2019 was now one of regression or backsliding<sup>46 47 48</sup>.
- 1.5.2 A couple of sources were pessimistic about the progress made. The Ambo University lecturers stated ‘[a]s a region we were hopeful for Oromia but right now we as a group of academics are pessimistic about our prime minister’<sup>49</sup> whilst one of the NaMA leaders noted that after the alleged coup and subsequent actions of the state ‘[t]he hope we built over the past 18 months following Abiy’s acceptance and inaugural speech gradually transpired in to the air.’<sup>50</sup>
- 1.5.3 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University noted ‘When Abiy is not around and the government aren’t enforcing the legal reforms, there are members of the security forces abusing their powers. Abiy can try to redefine the laws and correct them but to how and to what extent can Abiy actually redefine the politics and practice in Ethiopia when there is so much to change.’<sup>51</sup>
- 1.5.4 The senior representatives of E-ZEMA thought that there was a gap between the government’s willingness to democratise and its capacity to do so<sup>52</sup>. 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.’<sup>53</sup>
- 1.5.5 The Life and Peace Institute acknowledged that the ‘reforms are complex and will take time’<sup>54</sup>, 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.’<sup>55</sup>. Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted the (large) scale of the task facing Abiy in redefining politics and practice in Ethiopia<sup>56</sup> and the senior representative of

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<sup>45</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>47</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>48</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>49</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>50</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>51</sup> Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019

<sup>52</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>53</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>54</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

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.’<sup>57</sup>

- 1.5.6 The Life and Peace Institute stated that there were political groups seeking to hinder the transitional process<sup>58</sup>. The senior representatives of E-ZEMA similarly noted the challenges informal groups (who act not 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 period<sup>59</sup>.
- 1.5.7 Hassan Moalin, ONLF, opined that both the central and regional government in the Somali Regional State (SRS) were making progress, but accepting political opposition became more difficult in the lower levels of government, where there could be more resistance to change and transition<sup>60</sup>.
- 1.5.8 The British Embassy and William Davison noted that the rise in political liberalism has led to volatility or fragility across Ethiopia<sup>61 62</sup>, with William Davison noting that this has led to ‘politically driven violence which is likely to continue’<sup>63</sup>.
- 1.5.9 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 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.’<sup>64</sup>

See also [Impact of June 2019 assassinations/attempted coup on the reform process](#)

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## 1.6 Impact of June 2019 assassinations/attempted coup on the reform process

- 1.6.1 A number of sources referred to the assassinations/attempted coup in Amhara state on 22 June 2019. For context, information from 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, General Seare Mekonnen, was shot dead, alongside another officer<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>58</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>59</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>60</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>61</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>62</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>63</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>64</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>65</sup> BBC, Ethiopia army chief shot dead in 'coup bid' attacks, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

- 1.6.2 The Horn of Africa Researcher noted that the alleged coup attempt on 22 June 2019 was a ‘wake-up call for the government’<sup>66</sup>.
- 1.6.3 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.’<sup>67</sup>
- 1.6.4 Hassan Moalin, ONLF noted: ‘The assassination in June 2019 affected the whole of Ethiopia, even for us in the 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.’<sup>68</sup>
- 1.6.5 The DFID staff noted 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.’<sup>69</sup>

See also [Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt of June 2019](#) and [Use of Anti-Terrorism Proclamation](#)

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## 2. Political opposition

### 2.1 General ability to function

- 2.1.1 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 politics<sup>70</sup>.
- 2.1.2 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.’<sup>71</sup>
- 2.1.3 The same source also 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 function<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>67</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>68</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>69</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>70</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>71</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>72</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

- 2.1.4 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<sup>73</sup>.
- 2.1.5 Hassan Moalin of the ONLF and the British Embassy considered that the ONLF were generally able to function with few difficulties<sup>74 75</sup>.
- 2.1.6 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.'<sup>76</sup>
- 2.1.7 In relation to Oromia, the Ambo University lecturers noted 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.'<sup>77</sup>
- 2.1.8 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 Addis<sup>78</sup>.

See also [State treatment/Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA below](#)

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## 2.2 Registration of political groups

- 2.2.1 The Election, Political Parties Registration and Election Ethics law of 24 August 2019 re-established the Electoral Board<sup>79</sup>.
- 2.2.2 The legal expert stated that most political parties in existence were not registered. Out of more than 130 political parties, no more than 30 were registered. The source opined they were operating without licences and that the government and the Election Board were not concerned about progressing the applications for licences, or making sure they had a licence<sup>80</sup>
- 2.2.3 Hassan Moalin explained 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

<sup>73</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>74</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>75</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>76</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>77</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>78</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>79</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>80</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

certificate<sup>81</sup>. The Political Section, British Embassy noted that '[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'<sup>82</sup>

- 2.2.4 OFC and NaMA were registered political parties, although one of the NaMA leaders stated it took their organisation 6 months to receive the registration certificate<sup>83 84 85</sup>.
- 2.2.5 According to a representative of the OFC, the OLF were not an officially registered political party<sup>86</sup>. Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA stated that the OLF were allowed to register for the election, but not allowed to open regional offices<sup>87</sup>. The OLF officers stated that the party had finalised and submitted all the required documents and were waiting for the response from the national election board and were not yet registered<sup>88</sup>.
- 2.2.6 William Davison, Crisis Group, noted the fragmented nature of the OLF and that none of the factions had yet registered as a political group in Addis Ababa<sup>89</sup>.
- 2.2.7 The representative from OFC also stated 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.'<sup>90</sup>

See also [Scheduled national elections: May 2020](#)

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## 2.3 Opening of offices

- 2.3.1 Representatives of NaMA, ONLF and OLF confirmed that their respective groups have been able to open offices<sup>91 92 93</sup>. One of the NaMA leaders explained that they have opened 160 offices and the OLF officers stated they opened 40 although 30 had since been closed<sup>94 95</sup>.
- 2.3.2 The Political Section at 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 government<sup>96</sup>. Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 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 office<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>82</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>83</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>84</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>85</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>86</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>87</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>88</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>89</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>90</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>91</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>92</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>93</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>94</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>95</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>96</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>97</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

- 2.3.3 Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA, noted, in relation to issues with the OLF opening a regional office that there was ‘Not really [a] command chain between the higher officials and the lower officials. Nobody gave the instruction that they couldn’t open. The problem is in the region where they are trying to open. Bureaucratic, structural issues but it is stopping them from functioning.’<sup>98</sup>

See also [Arrests](#) and [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA](#)

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## 2.4 Meetings

- 2.4.1 NaMA 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)<sup>99</sup>.
- 2.4.2 DFID Ethiopia staff stated ‘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.’<sup>100</sup>
- 2.4.3 Senior representatives of E-ZEMA stated they covered 400 election districts, including 100% coverage in the ‘south’ of the country and had a representative in each of the 9 regions although they had less penetration into Oromia with representation in around a third of the 179 districts<sup>101</sup>. The same source 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 [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.’<sup>102</sup>

See also [Arrests](#) and [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA](#)

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<sup>98</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>99</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>100</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>101</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>102</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

## 2.5 Scheduled national elections: May 2020

- 2.5.1 Since meeting with sources in September 2019, the electoral board has announced a provisional date for elections to be held on 16 August 2020<sup>103</sup>.
- 2.5.2 A couple of sources noted elections were due in May 2020 and were likely to be contested, with the potential for tension to rise in the country<sup>104 105</sup>.
- 2.5.3 The legal executive and the Ambo University lecturers noted the voting system in Ethiopia continues to be the 'first past the post' system despite calls to reform this to proportional representation<sup>106 107</sup>. The Ambo University lecturers expressed pessimism and that '[t]he preparation for the election is not so good. It's lagging behind.'<sup>108</sup>
- 2.5.4 Sources discussed the reform of the national electoral board (NEB). Wondemagegn Goshu stated that the new electoral board under Abiy was good, whilst acknowledging that the organisation still had capacity issues<sup>109</sup>. One of the NaMA leaders noted the employment of 'brilliant people' in the NEB gave them hope for a credible election<sup>110</sup>.
- 2.5.5 Senior representatives of the OFC noted that the change in electoral law meant that parties were required to obtain more signatures in order to form a national party, rising from 1,500 previously to 10,000. The source stated this had a financial impact, as although they had over a million supporters they did not have the resource to go around the country collecting the signatures; a problem not faced by the government<sup>111</sup>.
- 2.5.6 However, the DFID staff observed that:
- 'If you are a national party and the population of the country is 100 million, needing 10,000 signatures is proportionate. It will ensure that parties would have constituencies.
- 'This law is making elections fair, free and competitive and contributes to the constitution. The law is a problem to groups who do not have a constitution. A lot of legal and nationalist groups do not have an issue with this law. They got the big parties together after the law was drafted and they – e.g. OLF, G7 – are fine with it.'<sup>112</sup>
- 2.5.7 The senior representative of the OFC noted:
- 'Some of the major issues [with the election law] which even now [I] still do not understand are the following; the need to leave your job, most people cannot afford to leave their jobs for 3 months....Secondly, many people with experience to run are already employed by the government or within the ruling party so this would not be helpful for the country. Teachers do not support the government but do not have the opportunity to take annual

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<sup>103</sup> Reuters, 'Ethiopia sets tentative August date for elections', 15 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>105</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>106</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>107</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>108</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>109</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>110</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>111</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>112</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

leave, so how can they campaign? The final issue is, which I believe is morally wrong, is the [definition of ] government [employees] does not include ministers, parliamentarians, members of council ...so the law [requiring civil servants running for office to take leave without pay] does not apply to them'.<sup>113</sup>

- 2.5.8 Sources noted the role ethno-nationalism would play in the forthcoming election. The senior representative of OFC noted each political group represented an ethnicity and '[t]here are competing nationalist ideas, some say we should first protect our regions and our ethnic groups'<sup>114</sup>. William Davison, Crisis Group noted that the ethno-nationalists' political agenda could bring more instability <sup>115</sup>.
- 2.5.9 The Head of an International NGO noted that: 'For the election to happen you need a census to define population, but to do that will create a lot of ethnic tension, especially as population data has defined some administrative boundaries based on ethnicity'.<sup>116</sup>
- 2.5.10 Representatives of E-ZEMA and Hassan Moalin, ONLF anticipated increased focus and attention on political opposition groups during the election period<sup>117 118</sup>. The OLF officers stated they did not expect the election to be free, fair and credible but were preparing nonetheless<sup>119</sup>.

See also [General ability to function](#) and [Registration of political groups](#)

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## 2.6 Freedom to protest

- 2.6.1 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'.<sup>120</sup>
- 2.6.2 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 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

<sup>113</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>114</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>115</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>116</sup> [Head of an International NGO, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>117</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>118</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>119</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>120</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

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.<sup>121</sup>.

- 2.6.3 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, stated there had been examples of arbitrary arrests, linked to demonstrations<sup>122</sup>.

See also [Oromo protests 2014-2018](#) and [Arrests of political opposition](#)

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## 2.7 Challenges from non-state actors

- 2.7.1 The Horn of Africa researcher noted that whereas previously the political space had been restricted by central government now there were multiple actors who were affecting the ability of groups to function, for example local 'trouble makers' or gangs<sup>123</sup>.
- 2.7.2 E-ZEMA also explained the challenges faced from multiple actors while campaigning, including from local groups and new groups that were not registered. They provided the example of an unidentified group who broke into the office and took phones and computers<sup>124</sup>.
- 2.7.3 DFID Ethiopia staff noted 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.'<sup>125</sup>

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## 3. National Movement of Amhara (NaMA)

### 3.1 Membership and profile

- 3.1.1 A NaMA leader noted that the profile of its supporters and members was mixed and diverse. It included farmers, professors, students, and youths as active supporters. In Addis Ababa, 80% were university graduates<sup>126</sup>.
- 3.1.2 In relation to the differentiation between members and supporters within the organisation, one of the NaMA leaders noted: 'Members have to be formally registered and pay monthly contributions and have the right to elect and be elected. Supporters are not formally registered or have no ID cards but they give us ideas and participate in events, donate money, help us organise town hall meetings, for example on a volunteer basis.'<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>122</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>123</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>124</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>125</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>126</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>127</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

## 3.2 Capacity and support

- 3.2.1 The Horn of Africa researcher stated: 'NaMA party appeared to be the most organised although it has reportedly been hard hit since the June [2019] violence.'<sup>128</sup>
- 3.2.2 One of the NaMA leaders opined that the party was extremely popular amongst the Amhara<sup>129</sup>. Additionally, that out of the opposition groups, NaMA had the largest number of members but: 'The numbers fluctuate, and it is hard to give an estimate. The last report I had from the organisation was half a million nationally.'<sup>130</sup>

[Arrests of political opposition](#) and [Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt](#)

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## 4. Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (E-ZEMA)

### 4.1 Composition

- 4.1.1 Senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted that the party was formed after the dissolution of 7 former political groups<sup>131</sup>. 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.'<sup>132</sup>

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### 4.2 Aims

- 4.2.1 The senior representatives from E-ZEMA outlined their aims: 'We want our politics to be for all. We want social justice. We want everyone – all Ethiopians – to have access to social services. We want an Ethiopian country where everyone respects individual cultures and languages and have a civil society with equal rights, education and engage with where markets need to grow.'<sup>133</sup>

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### 4.3 Membership and profile

- 4.3.1 The senior representatives from E-ZEMA stated they were not a party directed along ethnic lines and that anyone with Ethiopian citizenship was able to join<sup>134</sup>.
- 4.3.2 The source explained how the organisation distinguished between members and supporters:
- 'For members we give id cards. The process consists of the person being given a form where you need to include personal information such as, address, your photo, your employment and then you have to pay a membership fee. Outside of our memberships we have supporters, who are willing to vote for us and speak about us, these people may volunteer but not

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<sup>128</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>129</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>130</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>131</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>132</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>133</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>134</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

take out a membership. In each election district only members can select who will represents the district.

‘The process for electing a representative for each district is ...[that]... only members who have been contributing to the party can be elected. They are usually picked from 23 members. This is different to the followers/supporters. Followers and supporters can volunteer, and they are not required to fill out a form.’<sup>135</sup>

- 4.3.3 In relation to state treatment of members and supporters, the organisation stated the government or woreda [an administrative division, managed by a local government] could not always distinguish between the two<sup>136</sup>.

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#### 4.4 Capacity and support

- 4.4.1 The senior representatives from E-ZEMA stated the party was operating in 400 of the election districts and were reaching out further. At the time of the FFM, they were collecting data on the number of members (those who had officially joined and financially contributed to the party)<sup>137</sup>.

See also [State treatment](#)

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### 5. Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

#### 5.1 Membership

- 5.1.1 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.’<sup>138</sup> The same source stated that they have lots of supporters, but they are not all members<sup>139</sup>.

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#### 5.2 Capacity and support

- 5.2.1 Approximately 70% of people in the Somali region supported ONLF<sup>140</sup>.
- 5.2.2 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 world<sup>141</sup>.

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<sup>135</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>136</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>137</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>138</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>139</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>140</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>141</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

### 5.3 ONLF combatants

- 5.3.1 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.'<sup>142</sup>
- 5.3.2 DFID Ethiopia staff noted 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 remained<sup>143</sup>.
- 5.3.3 The British Embassy noted 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 arms<sup>144</sup>. Hassan Moalin, ONLF, noted that some could be attracted to other groups who could utilise their experience as trained fighters <sup>145</sup>.
- 5.3.4 The Political section, British Embassy, 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 qualifications<sup>146</sup>.

See also [State treatment](#)

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### 6. Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7)

- 6.1.1 The Horn of Africa researcher observed that the PG7 are no longer in existence having been disbanded and the supporters amalgamated into other organizations such as NaMA<sup>147</sup>.
- 6.1.2 The political group E-ZEMA now included the former leader of PG7, Berhanu Nega<sup>148</sup>.
- 6.1.3 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 funding<sup>149</sup>.

See also [State treatment](#)

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<sup>142</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>143</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>144</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>145</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>146</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>147</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>148</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>149</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

## 7. Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)

### 7.1 Aims and objectives

- 7.1.1 The OLF officers stated: ‘...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.<sup>150</sup>
- 7.1.2 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 Oromia<sup>151</sup>.
- 7.1.3 The Life and Peace Institute noted: ‘When the OLF returned [from exile] they did not come with good faith, they have been waiting for this moment for so long, this new possibility, the OLF wanted nationalism [i.e. their own nation state]... It is now a kind of brand.’<sup>152</sup>

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### 7.2 Membership process

- 7.2.1 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 offices<sup>153</sup>.

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### 7.3 Capacity and support

- 7.3.1 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 operating<sup>154</sup>.
- 7.3.2 The senior representatives of the OFC 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 election<sup>155</sup>.
- 7.3.3 In terms of location of support, DFID Ethiopia staff noted their presence and ability to function in Addis Ababa but stated their regional position has been marginalised, for example in Guji it has decreased<sup>156</sup>. The Life and Peace Institute noted that the OLF has most supporters in Oromia, especially in the

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<sup>150</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>151</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>152</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>153</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>154</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>155</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>156</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

west, but also noted that there were differences in support throughout Oromia due to regional and cultural diversity<sup>157</sup>.

- 7.3.4 In relation to the demographic of those following or supporting the OLF officers described it as coming from 'a large social base'.<sup>158</sup> The Horn of Africa Researcher noted support came from older Oromo<sup>159</sup>, and the Life Peace Institute suggested it included teachers, young people and ordinary citizens<sup>160</sup>.
- 7.3.5 The Life and Peace Institute opined that the majority of Oromos supported the OLF and would count themselves directly or indirectly as members. The same source noted 'OLF will win 100% of the votes in the west of Oromia (where OLF started), but not sure about the rest of the Oromia. Oromia is diverse, both culturally and regionally diverse. Western Oromia is protestant and the rest of Oromia depends where Jawar Mohammed [owner of the Oromo Media Network and activist] has connection and it depends if he supports OPD or Abiy. Shewa are pro-Abiy. Real political competition. He is still popular.'<sup>161</sup>
- 7.3.6 Concerning their popularity, the Ambo University lecturers and William Davison noted how the idea of the group resonates amongst people for example the flag, the name and the organisation<sup>162 163</sup>. The Ambo University lecturers stated 'The OLF flag is what is considered the Oromia flag... The OLF flag is now associated with the Oromo people and their struggle and why they were conflicted with the previous government.'<sup>164</sup>
- 7.3.7 The Life and Peace Institute noted the emotional attachment and attraction of the party, that the OLF are a symbol or brand and all splinter groups have the name as it is prestigious and emotive<sup>165</sup>.
- 7.3.8 The Horn of Africa researcher noted that since the return of Daoud Ibsa [or Dawad Ibsa, OLF chair and leader of one of the OLF factions<sup>166</sup>] to Ethiopia his support has dropped<sup>167</sup>.
- 7.3.9 William Davison, Crisis Group stated: 'OLF is fragmented, but it has returned with renewed political strength, and thus remains a strong threat to the ruling party.'<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>158</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>159</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>160</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>161</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>162</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>163</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>164</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>165</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>166</sup> Addis Standard, 'The interview: "We think we will win a majority in Oromia and win significant seats in the federal parliament," Dawud Ibsa', 3 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>167</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>168</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

## 7.4 Structure and composition

- 7.4.1 Multiple sources noted that the OLF had splintered and was composed of different factions<sup>169 170 171 172 173 174</sup>.
- 7.4.2 Sources differed in their assessment of the number of factions. One of the NaMA leaders stated there were at least 4 groups<sup>175</sup> whereas DFID Ethiopia estimated 6-7 factions<sup>176</sup>. 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))<sup>177 178</sup>.
- 7.4.3 William Davison 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.'<sup>179</sup> 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 is<sup>180</sup>.
- 7.4.4 The legal expert and one of the NaMA leaders stated the leader of the rebel group [OLA] was Jal Mero<sup>181 182</sup> [also known as Kumsa Diriba and Jaal Marro<sup>183</sup>]. One of the NaMA leaders attributed the Jal Mero group as responsible for fighting with the government forces in West Wollega (part of Oromia)<sup>184</sup>. The Life and Peace Institute explained that this group 'in the bush' in West Wollega believed that freedom came from fighting<sup>185</sup>.
- 7.4.5 The Life and Peace Institute and the legal expert noted the existence of the Addis Ababa based group<sup>186 187</sup>, as did one of the NaMA leaders who explained it was led by Dawud Ibsa and was involved in peaceful engagement<sup>188</sup>.
- 7.4.6 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 Gelchu<sup>189</sup>.

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<sup>169</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>170</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>171</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>172</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>173</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>174</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>175</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>176</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>177</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>178</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>179</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>180</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>181</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>182</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>183</sup> Ethiopia24, 'Interview With OLF commander Jaal Marro / Kumsa Diriba', 18 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>184</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>185</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>186</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>187</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>188</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>189</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

7.4.7 Garoma B Wakessa thought that the military commander of the OLF [OLA] was Gamachu Ayana<sup>190</sup>

7.4.8 The Political section, British Embassy, noted ‘there is general infighting between OLF factions and youth groups.’<sup>191</sup>

See also [Shene/Shane/Shaaane](#), [Qeerroo](#) and [State treatment](#)

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## 7.5 Shene/Shane/Shaaane

7.5.1 Sources differed in their definition and explanation of who or what ‘Shene’/ ‘Shane’ (pronounced “shen-nay”) is.

7.5.2 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 structure<sup>192 193</sup>. 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.’<sup>194</sup>.

7.5.3 DFID Ethiopia staff noted the head of the ‘Shene’ faction was in Addis preparing for the election<sup>195</sup>.

7.5.4 The OLF officers stated 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”.’<sup>196</sup> 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.’<sup>197</sup>

For information on the treatment of Shene see [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA](#)

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## 7.6 OLF in ‘the bush’/Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)

7.6.1 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

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<sup>190</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>191</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>192</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>193</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>194</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>195</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>196</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>197</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

OLA or more precisely the fighters who used to be connected to OLF/OLA is open to debate.<sup>198</sup>.

7.6.2 The senior representative of the OFC explained that the fighters in the bush are the part of the OLF who have not laid down their arms<sup>199</sup>. 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.'<sup>200</sup>.

7.6.3 DFID Ethiopia staff noted:

'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.'<sup>201</sup>.

7.6.4 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.'<sup>202</sup>

7.6.5 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 violence<sup>203</sup>. 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 in charge in Oromia from Asmara.'<sup>204</sup>

7.6.6 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 left<sup>205</sup>. DFID Ethiopia staff, when asked about OLF fighters joining

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<sup>198</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>199</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>200</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>201</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>202</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>203</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>204</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>205</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

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.'<sup>206</sup>

- 7.6.7 The legal expert noted: '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.'<sup>207</sup>. The senior representative of the OFC opined 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 relationship<sup>208</sup>.
- 7.6.8 The senior representatives of OFC noted the importance of integration into the security services for OLF combatants, in terms of economic opportunity and the create an alternative livelihood<sup>209</sup>.

See also See also [Shene/Shane/Shane](#) and [State treatment](#)

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## 7.7 Qeerroo

- 7.7.1 The Horn of Africa Researcher and William Davidson noted the difficulty in explaining 'qeerroo' <sup>210</sup> <sup>211</sup>. 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'.<sup>212</sup>
- 7.7.2 The OLF officers stated the only active youth organisation was 'qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo' and they received orders from OLF<sup>213</sup>. 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 media<sup>214</sup>.
- 7.7.3 Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA, explained that the term qeerroo was for the youth wing of the Oromo organisation 'National Oromian Youth Movement for Freedom and Democracy'.<sup>215</sup>
- 7.7.4 In relation to the extent to which OLF were in control of the qeerroo, William Davison opined that there was not much organisation and that they were an insurgency opposition group<sup>216</sup>.
- 7.7.5 William Davison also provided some background to the formation of the qeerroo, explaining: 'There was a large group of anti-government Oromo

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<sup>206</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>207</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>208</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>209</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>210</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>211</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>212</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>213</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>214</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>215</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>216</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

protesters. There were some networking between educational institutions, some websites, some messaging groups and a high level of organisation surrounding the successful protest movement. In those groups some identified as Qeerroo. There were cohesive units and a morphing of groups.<sup>217</sup>

- 7.7.6 The OLF officers noted that during the protest period between 2014-2018, the ruling-OPDO (now ODP) tried to organise their own qeerroos, but these no longer existed. Since 2011 the OLF had established, trained and given orders for the activities of the qeerroos. They were part of the OLF movement as the youth wing involved in the Oromo protests against the 'masterplan' in 2015. The source described them as one of the major actors for change<sup>218</sup>.

For treatment of qeerroos see [State treatment](#), [Arrests and detention of journalists](#) and [Oromo protests \(2014 -2016\)](#)

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## 7.8 Relationship with other political parties

- 7.8.1 The senior representatives of the OFC explained the relationship between the OFC and OLF. The source stated that there was a tacit understanding not to divide the youth support and a future of co-operation, but the organisations had not merged<sup>219</sup>.
- 7.8.2 The same source noted the government differentiated between the OLF and OFC, and were more agreeable to the OFC in comparison to the OLF<sup>220</sup>.
- 7.8.3 The Ambo University lecturers noted the competition between OLF and ODP. The source opined that this was due to ambitions on power and party egos. The same source opined that ODP planned to eliminate the OLF and the OLA (the political and military wings)<sup>221</sup>

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## 8. Security sector

### 8.1 Reform and restructure

- 8.1.1 The DFID staff noted that there was a sense of a new system and regime with change filtering through the system, but this was an 'Addis centric feeling'. The extent to how it was working in the regions differed<sup>222</sup>. The senior representative of OFC noted that the reforms were not being sent down or enforced at regional level, as the government did not have the experience or capacity to do so<sup>223</sup>.
- 8.1.2 Several sources noted a rapid dismantling or purging of the security sector without new systems being put in place. The senior representative of OFC noted that '[t]he whole system has changed and purged, but a new order has

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<sup>217</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>218</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>219</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>220</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>221</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>222</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>223</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

not been put in place. We are at a critical crossroad.’<sup>224</sup> DFID Ethiopia staff stated ‘You have a sense across the board that there is a new system and regime but there are a lot of errors within this as forces act how they want. The old systems have been dissected/removed, but a new one has not been put in place, it means security/police do not have a mandate on how they can act.’<sup>225</sup>

- 8.1.3 The Life and Peace Institute considered ‘Abiy dismantled the authoritarian structures too quickly. The first sector was the security sector, which is one of the most complicated sectors to break down and reform. Abiy knows whoever is in charge of the intelligence is in the ruling party so he tried to restructure this sector to get rid of the TPLF, but Abiy didn’t replace it with a new reform [sic, system/structure] which caused issues at the regional level.’<sup>226</sup>
- 8.1.4 William Davidson and the Life and Peace Institute noted the significance of the removal of TPLF from the security apparatus, especially the military and intelligence service which were previously dominated by Tigrayans or TPLF<sup>227 228</sup>. William Davidson also noted that this power shift had caused upheaval and raised a question over the efficacy of the security organisations<sup>229</sup>. The Life and Peace Institute considered that the removal of TPLF led to a lack of experience in the security service which meant they were unprepared and unaware of the alleged coup before it happened. The source opined this would not have happened under the previous government<sup>230</sup>.
- 8.1.5 The OLF officers noted that the officials who were under the previous government and loyal to TPLF had been replaced by those loyal to Abiy, but the structure of the security services has remained the same. The source stated the situation was similar for areas within the justice sector; ‘hence the judicial procedure has remained the same.’<sup>231</sup> Hassan Moalin, ONLF, stated ‘There is a power struggle within the EPRDF. The reforms, which the [the security sector] is part [of] has started but there is still a long way to go until we see change.’<sup>232</sup>
- 8.1.6 The Horn of Africa researcher described security has having ‘crumbled and [it] has created a vacuum for about a year [2018-2019].’ The source added ‘We have now seen deployment of the army again where we had seen this vacuum... The army, there have been changes at the top but not any clear security sector reforms...We saw a breakdown of security apparatus at many levels, but we are starting to see a reassertion from the federal level which could be good or bad, a mixed bag.’<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>225</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>226</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>227</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>228</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>229</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>230</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>231</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>232</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>233</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

- 8.1.7 The senior representatives from E-ZEMA noted that although they felt the government's ability to control law and order across the country was limited, there were positive intentions to develop that capacity<sup>234</sup>. Conversely, the legal expert felt Abiy was not committed enough to maintaining law and order<sup>235</sup>.
- 8.1.8 The DFID staff observed '... there has been a decrease in protection by state, this is an area we are disappointed in, a lack of protection.' The same source noted: 'In terms of the institution, we have seen better commitment from government, for example the appointment of human rights institutions. We are disappointed in the security protection decrease, we don't really have a constitutional mandate, so the enforcement of human rights has been weak.'<sup>236</sup>

See also [Ethnic tension](#) and [Military training camps/rehabilitation centres](#), [Government control over federal security forces](#) and [Regional security forces](#)

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## 8.2 Accountability for past torture/corruption

- 8.2.1 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 cases<sup>237</sup>. 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 2019<sup>238</sup>, related to middle and lower level corruption. The source opined that the '[l]evel of accountability and acceptance of the government is shrinking.'<sup>239</sup>
- 8.2.2 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.
- '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.'<sup>240</sup>
- 8.2.3 The Horn of Africa Researcher, the British Embassy and Hassan Moalin noted that in the Somali Regional State there had been efforts to hold those responsible for human rights abuses accountable, including the arrest of the

<sup>234</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>235</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>236</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>237</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>238</sup> Amnesty International, 'Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia's Transition', 26 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>239</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>240</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

former state president Abdi Iley<sup>241 242 243</sup>, and, the Horn of Africa Researcher added, the prosecution of high-level personnel and Liyu police<sup>244</sup>. Hassan Moalin, ONLF, expressed concern, however, that the process may be stalled at federal level<sup>245</sup>.

8.2.4 Senior representatives from E-ZEMA noted:

‘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. We think there needs to be transitional justice or justice for past crimes, but we cannot go forward as a country by arresting and charging everyone from the previous government. We think some should be dealt with outside of the court system. However, where there are gross human rights abuses, or corruption, they should go via the courts.’<sup>246</sup>

8.2.5 DFID Ethiopia staff, the legal expert and William Davidson noted the failure to arrest the former head of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) Getachew Assefa for human rights abuses, despite there being an arrest warrant in place<sup>247 248 249</sup>. The senior representative of the OFC opined that this showed that ‘the regional government [in Tigray] will not support [the] central government’s actions’<sup>250</sup>. William Davison, Crisis Group, stated this demonstrated that ‘the federal government were no longer allowed into the region [Tigray] at will’<sup>251</sup>

8.2.6 DFID Ethiopia staff stated the failure to arrest Getachew Assefa was due to political reasons<sup>252</sup>. Similarly, the legal expert and active critic noted the belief from those in Amhara that the government were working with those in Tigray who wanted to remain in power and therefore he had not been arrested<sup>253</sup>.

8.2.7 The Life and Peace Institute noted that TPLF have been purged from government and charged but have been replaced by those close to Abiy, some of whom ‘do not have clean hands’). This selective accountability had fueled rumours and disenchantment a feeling amongst Tigrayans of being targeted<sup>254</sup>.

8.2.8 In relation to judicial process, the Life and Peace Institute stated there was ‘excitement’ when high profile people were arrested and charged, but the

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<sup>241</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>242</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>243</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>244</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>245</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>246</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>247</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>248</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>249</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>250</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>251</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>252</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>253</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>254</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

court process is very long. The court cases should be heard faster, more rigorously and impartially<sup>255</sup>.

See also [Detention conditions](#)

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### 8.3 Government control over federal security forces

- 8.3.1 In relation to the extent to which the government had control over the security forces, sources differed in their responses. Life and Peace Institute stated that there was control but the issue was with capacity<sup>256</sup>. The Political Section, British Embassy, stated the government had control of the federal forces<sup>257</sup>, and Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, stated at federal government level, Abiy had control of the military, police and security forces<sup>258</sup>.
- 8.3.2 William Davison, Crisis Group, stated: 'The national defence force is one of the strongest institutions in the government. There is an element of the regional power struggle which is spilling into the military and the assassination raised this question. But in general, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) is an institution that has remained loyal and in line with the federal government.'<sup>259</sup>
- 8.3.3 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted that the courts and law enforcement were politicised and did not always act in connection with the constitution, but on ethnic lines<sup>260</sup>.

See also [Reform and restructure](#)

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### 8.4 Regional security forces

- 8.4.1 The Political Section, British Embassy stated: '...under Ethiopian constitution primary responsibility for internal security lies with the regions. Regional Security forces vary hugely in size, training and how they see their role – whether truly to police or more as forces to defend against other armed actors, including from other regions.'<sup>261</sup>
- 8.4.2 Wondemagegn Goshu noted that the central government did not have effective control over regional security forces<sup>262</sup> and the senior officials of E-ZEMA noted that '[t]he government does not have effective control over the local regional states.'<sup>263</sup> Wondemagegn Goshu and the Life and Peace Institute considered that regional areas had become increasingly assertive<sup>264</sup><sup>265</sup>. William Davison, Crisis Group, noted '[t]o some extent the security

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<sup>255</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>256</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>257</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>258</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>259</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>260</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>261</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>262</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>263</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>264</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>265</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

apparatus is becoming loyal to the region and so not completely in line with the federal government.’<sup>266</sup>

- 8.4.3 The senior representatives of E-ZEMA also observed the government’s ability to control law and order across the country was limited because ‘The issue is with the regional police which are effectively the military. The federal government does not have direct control over these regional states and their militia. The regional states are based on ethno-linguistic groups and the security forces represent this. So, if you are not the same ethnicity as the majority of the region and effectively the police, then there may be some problems for you.’<sup>267</sup>
- 8.4.4 The senior representatives from E-ZEMA also noted ‘The transition period we are currently in is making the government weak because there are a lot of grievances. In a stable situation and country, you can manage the ordinary police and manage regional police effectively, but the transition is making this difficult for the government and it causes some regional issues.’<sup>268</sup>
- 8.4.5 Several sources noted the effect of ethnic politics on regional security services: William Davison observed ‘There are complicated federal dynamics at play, we are seeing increasingly assertive administrations in certain regions.’<sup>269</sup> Wondemagegn Goshu Addis Ababa University stated: ‘Abiy has not consolidated the regional states and their militias, there are some political groups against Abiy and his reforms and this is showing at the regional level... You can see the danger that arises from certain ethnic groups against each other.’<sup>270</sup>
- 8.4.6 Information on the effectiveness of security services varied between some regions. DFID Ethiopia staff noted that ‘[i]n Tigray there is still evidence that security is working’<sup>271</sup> while William Davison noted that ‘Tigray has a strong regional security apparatus’ although adding that Tigray’s autonomy could sometimes be exaggerated. He also noted that ‘Mekele is managing its own regional security.’<sup>272</sup>
- 8.4.7 The British Embassy noted that in SRS, the removal of Abdi Iley, former state president who has been prosecuted for human rights abuses, and the subsequent appointment of Mustafa Omer as president (a Somali political activist who used to work for the UN), brought in a new system. How the security and police forces behaved often depended on the person in charge<sup>273</sup>.
- 8.4.8 The Life and Peace Institute noted the rise of Amhara nationalism and militant groups, which was concerning<sup>274</sup>. William Davison stated: ‘There has been high-level political violence in Amhara region. The Amhara government

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<sup>266</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>267</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>268</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>269</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>270</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>271</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>272</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>273</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>274</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

nominated Asaminew Tsige to become the head of the regional administration/regional security—he was given a considerable scope, budget, autonomy etc., but this then led to confrontations.’<sup>275</sup>

8.4.9 DFID Ethiopia staff noted the complexities of regional policing. ‘Central police were a long way from village[s] to disperse violence. In the villages (where the kebele [small administrative unit] has authority) there can be corruption’<sup>276</sup>.

8.4.10 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted that ‘...we see that the government at times cannot protect all people. We hear about people being attacked by groups. The zonal and woreda officers can be complicit in this. The government respects rights, but the protection is lacking in some areas, especially in areas where they don’t speak the language or belong to a different ethnic group.’<sup>277</sup>

See also [State treatment](#) and [Ethnic tension](#)

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## 8.5 Liyu police

8.5.1 The British Embassy and Hassan Moalin 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’<sup>278</sup> <sup>279</sup>.

8.5.2 Hassan Moalin noted the decline in involvement of the security sector, including the Liyu police, in the political arena in the SRS<sup>280</sup>.

See also [Accountability for past torture/corruption](#)

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## 8.6 Military command posts

8.6.1 Several sources noted the existence of a military command post, or a de-facto state of emergency in some areas<sup>281</sup> <sup>282</sup> <sup>283</sup> <sup>284</sup> <sup>285</sup> <sup>286</sup>. DFID Ethiopia staff stated there was a military presence at the command posts, but it was not a violent situation<sup>287</sup>.

8.6.2 Sources differed in the information provided in relation to the number and location of military command posts:

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<sup>275</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>276</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>277</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>278</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>279</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>280</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>281</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>282</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>283</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>284</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>285</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>286</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>287</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

- present in 4 zones in the Oromia region<sup>288</sup>
  - 9 out of 21 zonal administrations in the Oromia region were under the command post<sup>289</sup>
  - 5 in total, which included one in Oromia and some around the Somali border<sup>290</sup>
  - State of emergency in Sidama (imposed after the clashes)<sup>291</sup>.
- 8.6.3 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.'<sup>292</sup>
- 8.6.4 The OLF officers and Garoma B. Wakessa questioned the legality of the imposition of military command posts due to the length of time they had been in place<sup>293</sup> or because they had not been brought through parliament<sup>294</sup>.

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## 9. State treatment

### 9.1 Arrests

#### 9.1.1 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.'<sup>295</sup>

#### 9.1.2 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.'<sup>296</sup>

#### 9.1.3 William Davidson observed:

<sup>288</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>289</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>290</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>291</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>292</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>293</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>294</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>295</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>296</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

‘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.’<sup>297</sup>

9.1.4 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.’<sup>298</sup>

9.1.5 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 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.

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<sup>297</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>298</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

'The Somali Regional State [SRS] some people are arrested but it should have been done by the federal government including the former regional president .'<sup>299</sup>

9.1.6 DFID Ethiopia staff noted 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.'<sup>300</sup>

The source 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]'.<sup>301</sup>

9.1.7 Hassan Moalin 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 government<sup>302</sup>. The legal expert and critic noted that the situation in relation to arrests in Somali Regional State was more stable than elsewhere<sup>303</sup>.

9.1.8 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.'<sup>304</sup>

9.1.9 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

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<sup>299</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>300</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>301</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>302</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>303</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>304</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

constitutional rights to claim what they want, they followed legal procedure 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.'<sup>305</sup>

- 9.1.10 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.'<sup>306</sup>

See also [Security sector](#), [Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt](#) and [Use of Anti-Terrorism proclamation](#)

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## 9.2 Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt of June 2019

- 9.2.1 A number of sources referred to the assassinations/attempted coup in Amhara state on 22 June 2019<sup>307</sup> which lead to an immediate and widescale government response.

- 9.2.2 Senior representatives of E-ZEMA 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. The government were arresting all members of the opposition, 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.'<sup>308</sup>

- 9.2.3 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

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<sup>305</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>306</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>307</sup> BBC, Ethiopia army chief shot dead in 'coup bid' attacks, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>308</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

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.’<sup>309</sup>

9.2.4 The same source noted:

‘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’...’<sup>310</sup>

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.’<sup>311</sup>

9.2.5 The legal expert 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 (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...

‘There are lots of people who were assigned to regional government/district level in Amhara who were arrested. They were the General’s (Brigadier General Assaminew Tsigie), vices and deputies. This has a big impact and caused more frustrations for the people living in that area. Now the level of confidence the Amhara people have on the prime minister and his government is declining.

‘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

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<sup>309</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>310</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>311</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

are involved in Amhara politics or the National Movement of Amhara, which is a legally registered political party.’<sup>312</sup>.

9.2.6 One of the NaMA leaders noted:

‘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.’<sup>313</sup>

9.2.7 The legal expert noted: ‘In relation to my colleague and journalist who was arrested. He was a close friend of one of the people assassinated. He was arrested and released solely with ID card. Mass arrests in Addis working for newspaper and TV and members of political parties. These that are involved in Amhara politics or the National Movement of Amhara, which is a legally registered political party.’<sup>314</sup>

9.2.8 William Davison, Crisis Group, noted there was ‘...no clear link between the June assassinations and the people arrested in Amhara regional state’<sup>315</sup>.

9.2.9 Two sources stated 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<sup>316</sup>, 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<sup>317</sup>.

9.2.10 William Davison, Crisis Group, described 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.’<sup>318</sup> 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...

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<sup>312</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>313</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>314</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>315</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>316</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>317</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>318</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

‘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.’<sup>319</sup>

#### 9.2.11 The legal expert observed:

‘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.’<sup>320</sup>

#### 9.2.12 One of the NAMA leaders and the legal expert noted lengthy investigation and detention times or lengthy legal process at this time<sup>321</sup> <sup>322</sup>. DFID Ethiopia stated this could feed in to the notion that they were political prisoners<sup>323</sup>.

#### 9.2.13 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<sup>324</sup>.

See also [Use of Anti-Terrorism Proclamation](#)

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### 9.3 Use of Anti-Terrorism Proclamation

#### 9.3.1 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

<sup>319</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>320</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>321</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>322</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>323</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>324</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

process of reform<sup>325 326 327</sup>. Senior representatives of E-ZEMA stated these included journalists, supporters of NaMA and OLF Shene<sup>328</sup>.

9.3.2 One of the NaMA leaders noted: '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 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 coup<sup>329</sup>.

9.3.3 The legal expert commented 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.'<sup>330</sup>

9.3.4 The senior representatives of E-ZEMA observed:

'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 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.'<sup>331</sup>

9.3.5 The Horn of Africa researcher on being asked 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

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<sup>325</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>326</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>327</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>328</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>329</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>330</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>331</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

had committed to reform the law it was difficult to know why it was again being used<sup>332</sup>.

- 9.3.6 The Political Section, British Embassy stated: '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.'<sup>333</sup>

See also [Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt of June 2019](#) and [Reform and restructure](#)

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#### 9.4 Military training camps/rehabilitation centres

- 9.4.1 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<sup>334 335 336 337 338</sup>.

- 9.4.2 Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA provided further information on the location of training camps in Oromia after meeting the FFT:

- Tolay Training camp located on the western part of Oromia Jimma Road (near Tulu Bole Town)
- Ziway Training Camp located in the southern part of Oromia (Shahemene Road)
- Sankele Training Camp located south of Ambo Town [West Shewa, Oromia Region]<sup>339</sup>

- 9.4.3 The Ambo University lecturers opined there were also detention centres in Amhara but Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University did not think there were mass arrests in Amhara or people being put in training camps<sup>340 341</sup>.

- 9.4.4 The legal expert did not have details on the allegations of detentions in rehabilitation centres in Oromia but defined what rehabilitation centres generally meant in Ethiopia. The source stated those arrested were put in military-style camps for a few weeks to be trained and indoctrinated in constitutional and/ or party issues<sup>342</sup>. The senior representatives of the OFC and the Ambo university lecturers similarly noted training, teaching or indoctrination was part of the camp detention process<sup>343 344</sup>.

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<sup>332</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>333</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>334</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>335</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>336</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>337</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>338</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>339</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>340</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>341</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>342</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>343</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>344</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

- 9.4.5 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<sup>345 346 347</sup>.
- 9.4.6 Three sources noted that visiting and contact with those in training camps was not possible<sup>348 349 350</sup>. The FFT team asked sources where the information about the numbers of people detained and conditions in the camps was obtained from, and they stated former prisoners<sup>351 352</sup>, claims from the media and activists<sup>353</sup>, police (OLF or ethnically affiliated to the detainees)<sup>354 355</sup>.

See also [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA](#)

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## 9.5 Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA

- 9.5.1 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<sup>356 357</sup>. 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.'<sup>358</sup> 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 detained<sup>359</sup>.
- 9.5.2 The OLF officers speculated 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.'<sup>360</sup> 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<sup>361 362 363</sup>.

<sup>345</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>346</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>347</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>348</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>349</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>350</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>351</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>352</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>353</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>354</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>355</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>356</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>357</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>358</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>359</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>360</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>361</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>362</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>363</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

9.5.3 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.’<sup>364</sup>

9.5.4 DFID Ethiopia staff cautioned 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 SRS for example if they were OLF or Oromo where they could be picked up by local security forces<sup>365</sup>.

9.5.5 William Davison, Crisis Group noted:

‘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.’<sup>366</sup>

9.5.6 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 space<sup>367</sup>. 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.’<sup>368</sup>

9.5.7 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 supporters<sup>369</sup>.

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<sup>364</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>365</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>366</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>367</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>368</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>369</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

- 9.5.8 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.'<sup>370</sup>
- 9.5.9 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]<sup>371</sup>.
- 9.5.10 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 court<sup>372</sup>.
- 9.5.11 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 time period that the sources were talking about was often unclear.
- 9.5.12 William Davidson noted that 'We are hearing reports filtering through of thousands of journalists, activists and protesters being arrested in Oromia.'<sup>373</sup> 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.'<sup>374</sup> 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 months<sup>375</sup>. The Ambo University lecturers opined the number was 5000 qeerroos, scholars, professors and medical teachers<sup>376</sup>. One of the NaMA leaders noted 6000 Oromos reportedly detained in Sankele military camp by ODP<sup>377</sup>.
- 9.5.13 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.'<sup>378</sup> 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

<sup>370</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>371</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>372</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>373</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>374</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>375</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>376</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>377</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>378</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

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 itself.

- 9.5.14 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.'<sup>379</sup>

- 9.5.15 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 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.'<sup>380</sup>

- 9.5.16 The Political section, British Embassy, however, noted: '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.'<sup>381</sup>

- 9.5.17 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 alleged<sup>382</sup>.

- 9.5.18 In relation to the profile and type of people detained, 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 queerroo in

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<sup>379</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>380</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>381</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>382</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

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 military<sup>383</sup>. Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA stated those detaining people in military camps were central government police and Special Oromo Forces<sup>384</sup>.

9.5.19 After meeting with the FFT Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA provided reports from the organisation documenting arrests, detentions and killings in Oromia. The documents provided are:

- ‘Forcefully Disappeared Persons since 1992’, undated (partially in English);
- ‘Ethiopia - Killings and Imprisonments will not solve political disputes in Oromia’, 11 January 2019. This report, amongst other information, contains a list of 24 people killed in Western Wollega district (undated), and the names of some Oromos detained. And;
- HRLHA press release ‘Ethiopia: Transition to Democracy at a Crossroads Persistent Human Rights Violations and Harassment Continue Unabated’ 3 May 2019. This report, amongst other information, lists the names of 222 people detained.

See also [OLF](#), [Arrests and detention OLF/Shene/OLA](#) and [Military training camps/rehabilitation centres](#)

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## 9.6 Detention conditions

- 9.6.1 A number of sources 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’<sup>385</sup>. While DFID Ethiopia staff noted a reduction in state perpetrated violence, decreased reports of torture and a decrease in murders committed by security forces<sup>386</sup>.
- 9.6.2 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa university, noted there have been examples of beatings by police as there has not been much change within the security forces, but these were individual incidents<sup>387</sup>.
- 9.6.3 A number of sources gave examples of detention without proper access to psychologists or social workers<sup>388</sup>, food and water, medical care and mental and physical harassment or abuse<sup>389 390</sup>. One of the OLF officers stated there had been a clash between the prisoners and police in Sankele the week prior to meeting the FFT (September 2019) and more than 150 people were injured, including women<sup>391</sup>.

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<sup>383</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>384</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>385</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>386</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>387</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>388</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>389</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>390</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>391</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

- 9.6.4 However, one of the NaMA leaders noted 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.'<sup>392</sup>
- 9.6.5 William Davison, Crisis Group noted: '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.'<sup>393</sup>
- 9.6.6 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University 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 visits<sup>394</sup>.
- 9.6.7 The legal expert stated: '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.'<sup>395</sup>

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## 9.7 Conditions on release

- 9.7.1 Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA noted 8 months ago [prior to September 2019] 20,000 were arrested and since released<sup>396</sup>.
- 9.7.2 In relation to past releases the Horn of Africa researcher noted that the process varied a lot pre-Abiy. During the Oromo protests conditions could include a verbal promise not to oppose the government, police reporting conditions, restrictions on leaving the area or sometimes a requirement to sign something for release. There seemed to be less restrictions on those released over the years<sup>397</sup>.
- 9.7.3 Regarding media reports that the government pardoned 13,000 prisoners in the six months preceding January 2019, the Horn of Africa researcher did not believe that released detainees or prisoners were given release/discharge documents<sup>398</sup>. The legal expert noted in relation to mass

<sup>392</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>393</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>394</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>395</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>396</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>397</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>398</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

releases, if it was an amnesty or pardon, it was done in accordance with the law<sup>399</sup>.

- 9.7.4 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 order<sup>400</sup>.
- 9.7.5 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 release<sup>401</sup>.
- 9.7.6 According to the legal expert after the assassinations in June 2019 terror suspects were released after a few months with just their own ID as warrant of security, which is uncommon for terrorist suspects. The source noted that a few weeks prior to meeting the FFT, 500-600 prisoners had been released after detention under the ATP<sup>402</sup>.
- 9.7.7 DFID Ethiopia staff noted re-arrests of released political prisoners at the time of the assassinations and that, due to re-arrest, the number of those released figures can be unclear<sup>403</sup>.

See also [Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt of June 2019](#), [Use of Anti-Terrorism Proclamation](#) and [Military training camps/rehabilitation centres](#)

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## 9.8 State differentiation between Oromos and OLF

- 9.8.1 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 OLF<sup>404</sup>. However, the Horn of Africa researcher noted that 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 make observations about the present situation<sup>405</sup>. 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.’<sup>406</sup>.
- 9.8.2 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

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<sup>399</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>400</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>401</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>402</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>403</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>404</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>405</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>406</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

University's main activities during the year 2018 (2011 in the Ethiopian Calendar) including the reconciliation between the ODP and OLF.



- 9.8.3 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 flag<sup>407</sup>. DFID Ethiopia also noted OLF flags were displayed everywhere, including in ODP offices<sup>408</sup>.

See also [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA](#)

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<sup>407</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>408</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

## 9.9 Government and armed group clashes

- 9.9.1 The legal expert stated that Abiy did not tackle the OLF who were fighting in parts of Ethiopia<sup>409</sup>. The senior representatives of the OFC stated that the government forces did not directly attack people in the bush as the forces were evenly matched. The source added that there have been weapons traded between government forces and fighters<sup>410</sup>.
- 9.9.2 Armed fighting continued in the Wollega and Guji regions. Clashes between government and civilians, including burning houses. Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA opined this was because they were supporters of the OLA<sup>411</sup>. The Horn of Africa researcher similarly noted reports of a counter-insurgency campaign against alleged OLF in Oromia and destruction of civilian property<sup>412</sup>.
- 9.9.3 The OLF officers stated in Oromia, human rights abuses had been committed including killings, vandalising, destruction and burning of property and rape<sup>413</sup>.
- 9.9.4 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<sup>414</sup>.
- 9.9.5 One of the NaMA leaders noted attacks by armed groups in Wollo and Shewa in Amhara region and the civilian attacks around Addis Ababa - Burayu Massacre of September 2018. The source opined there was a failure by Abiy's administration to protect civilians<sup>415</sup>.
- 9.9.6 In relation to allegations of OLF soldiers invading Amhara, the legal expert noted two major incidents in two different districts with a number of casualties reported by state media. The state government intervened and all of OLF fighters were ambushed or killed<sup>416</sup>.
- 9.9.7 One of the NaMA leaders speculated that there could be a conspiracy between the OPD, the military or Oromia special police to collaborate with the OLF in armed attacks. The source gave as an example the attacks of Amhara in Shewa where the source opined the government response was 'sluggish'<sup>417</sup>.

See also [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA](#) and [OLF in 'the bush'/OLA](#)

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<sup>409</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>410</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>411</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>412</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>413</sup> [OLF Officers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>414</sup> [Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>415</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>416</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>417</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

## 9.10 Returnees and diaspora

9.10.1 Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 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.'<sup>418</sup>

9.10.2 The Horn of Africa researcher noted:

'Haven't received new reports of new surveillance tools being used since the new government [have] come in to power. Although we might not have been monitoring as closely as before, but we haven't been receiving reports and we had before. It was a big issue, including by certain regional governments as well - previously monitoring of protests outside embassies abroad and arresting relatives back home etc. Very much part of the previous government. The diaspora remains a major actor but no evidence of it currently happening and evidently a lot of the diaspora have returned so probably not seen as being as much need to monitor them.'<sup>419</sup>

9.10.3 The Head of an International NGO noted returnees to Ethiopia included a request to their organisation for around 800 households to return from Djibouti. Most of them were Oromo, but the source opined it was difficult to know whether returning was due to Abiy, or law changes in Djibouti<sup>420</sup>.

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## 10. Oromo protests 2014-2018

### 10.1 Background

10.1.1 Anti-government protests (the Oromo protests) demanding equality, justice and freedom were organised between 2014-2018<sup>421</sup>. They started in 2015 with school students and spread on and off university campuses<sup>422</sup>.

10.1.2 Some of the central objectives during the Oromo protests were to determine the boundary of Addis Ababa (Finfinne to the Oromo) and make Afan Oromo the working official language of the federal government <sup>423</sup>.

See also [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA](#)

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### 10.2 State interest in past actions of Oromo protesters

10.2.1 Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA stated that most of the people who were arrested during the protests were members of qeerroo. The source opined that those linked to the protests were either in prison or their whereabouts unknown. The source cited a document from the organisation that stated over 7,500 people were killed in Oromia (before Abiy came to power) during the protests of 2014-2018. The source also noted 'Most of the people who were arrested were members of Qeerroo, the engineers of the change now we see in Ethiopia. They are the ones who are victimised in prison now.'<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>419</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>420</sup> [Head of International NGO, 20 September 2019,](#)

<sup>421</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>422</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>423</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>424</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

However, the senior representative of the OFC noted that all the prisoners from the previous protests had been released<sup>425</sup>.

10.2.2 The Ambo university lecturers stated that people were not being arrested now in relation to the protests and that the only people being arrested were those considered belonging to the shene<sup>426</sup>.

10.2.3 DFID Ethiopia staff stated: 'The state is still interested in some of the people in the Oromo protests, but the central committee of region has a lot of activists who participated in the protest and are now in the committee. They are in the local state structure in Oromia region... In Oromia, they released lots of people who were arrested in connection with the protests.'<sup>427</sup>

See also [Arrests and detention in Oromia including OLF/Shene/OLA, Qeerroo](#) and [Shene/Shane/Shane](#)

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## 11. Media

### 11.1 Media law

11.1.1 For legal reforms relating to the media see [Legal reform](#)

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### 11.2 Media freedom

11.2.1 The Ambo University lecturers noted journalists and the media had relative freedom and that formerly banned media like OMN (Oromia Media Network), ESAT (Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio) and ONN (Oromia News Network) were allowed to broadcast from within the country<sup>428</sup>.

Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted there were several papers and TV satellite programmes discussing a wide range of topics<sup>429</sup>.

11.2.2 E-ZEMA noted the prevalence of media output directed by the government<sup>430</sup>. Since the changes brought under Abiy, the Horn of Africa researcher noted with the return of activists and diaspora, there had not been a proliferation of more independent media outlets as hoped<sup>431</sup>.

11.2.3 The ability to report depended on the topic discussed. For example, there had been an opening up in relation to the discussion of broader issues (for example climate change), but the ability to criticise the government was lagging behind<sup>432</sup>. Similarly, the Horn of Africa researcher noted state media's reluctance to criticise the government<sup>433</sup>.

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<sup>425</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>426</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>427</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>428</sup> [Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019](#)

<sup>429</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>430</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>431</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>432</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>433</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

### 11.3 Role of social media

11.3.1 The legal expert opined Amhara and Oromo activists were utilising social media to promote their agendas. The source considered that if information was on social media and became a public issue, then the government responded, as seen by the arrests in Sidama:

‘If you look at the work of social media, it is the Amhara activists and Oromo activists who are setting the agenda. The government respond to this, if it becomes a public issue, the government responds.

‘Sidama [the request for a referendum on the creation of a federal state<sup>434</sup>] is an example of this. It is actually the Oromo activists who made this an agenda via social media. But the arrests that follow are then of the Sidama... not those who did this from the Oromia region or Oromo activists.’<sup>435</sup>

11.3.2 Senior representatives of E-ZEMA and the Horn of Africa Researcher noted the negative consequences of the rise of social media; increased hate speech and division<sup>436 437</sup>. The Horn of Africa researcher expressed concern about the rise of hate speech (on and offline) and the contribution this had to ethnic related violence<sup>438</sup>.

11.3.3 Senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted ‘The government in the past has tried to shut down social media; during exam periods and during the assassination when the government couldn’t control the flow of information.’<sup>439</sup>

See also [Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt of June 2019](#) and [Arrests](#)  
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### 11.4 Arrests and detention of journalists

11.4.1 The legal expert noted the arrest of a colleague and journalist after the assassination in June 2019 who was released on his ID card. The source noted mass arrests in Addis Ababa at this time included those working for newspapers and television stations<sup>440</sup>.

11.4.2 Senior representatives of E-ZEMA noted there were still some cases of arrests of journalists, for example one who was arrested at his office in Oromia and subsequently released. There were journalists still detained (as at 17 September 2019) due to what they reported during the assassination period<sup>441</sup>.

11.4.3 Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA, noted the arrest of qeerroo radio operators 3 days prior to meeting with the FFT. Media equipment was confiscated, and 5

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<sup>434</sup> BBC, ‘Ethiopia referendum: Dozens killed in Sidama clashes’, 22 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>435</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>436</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>437</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>438</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>439</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>440</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>441</sup> [Senior representatives of E-ZEMA, 17 September 2019](#)

journalists were arrested at the Addis Ababa office. The source stated they could not be found<sup>442</sup>.

11.4.4 One of the NaMA leaders noted the imprisonment of an Amhara Satellite Radio and Television (ASRAT) journalist and those from 'Ethiopsis' newspaper<sup>443</sup>.

11.4.5 However, DFID Ethiopia staff stated that there were no recent reports of journalists being arrested<sup>444</sup>.

See also [Arrests after assassinations/coup attempt of June 2019](#) and [Use of Anti-Terrorism Proclamation](#)

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## **12. Civil Society and Non-government organisations (NGOs)**

### **12.1 Registration**

12.1.1 Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA confirmed the organisation was formally registered as a local NGO in July 2019 and had also been registered to monitor the forthcoming election<sup>445</sup>.

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### **12.2 Ability to function**

12.2.1 The head of an international NGO detailed their organisation's remit and responsibilities and stated they had been active in relation to advocacy, which had been illegal until May 2019. The source believed, however, there was no substantial change to the Civil Society Organisations (CSO) law<sup>446</sup>.

12.2.2 The same source noted that advocacy could be difficult and provided the example of 25 NGOs which had written to the Ministry of Peace, Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs and the President of Gambella after the killing of aid workers in Gambella. The government's response had been that their actions were not acceptable or legal. The source did note, however, that that they were not arrested for their actions, which was a risk in September 2018<sup>447</sup>.

12.2.3 Garoma B Wakessa, HRLHA, stated the organisation had been able to open offices in regional places in order to obtain first-hand information. They had not opened offices in Addis Ababa due to funding issues but anticipated more state interest in the organisation when they do<sup>448</sup>.

12.2.4 The Horn of Africa researcher questioned the impartiality of some of civil society and noted it was too early to say whether the organisations such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission were going to be effective<sup>449</sup>.

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<sup>442</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>443</sup> [One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>444</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>445</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>446</sup> [Head of International NGO, 20 September 2019,](#)

<sup>447</sup> [Head of International NGO, 20 September 2019,](#)

<sup>448</sup> [Garoma B. Wakessa, HRLHA, 16 September 2019](#)

<sup>449</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

- 12.2.5 The same source noted that Human Rights Watch had been able to go into Ethiopia twice in 2019, the first time since 2011. The organisation had not faced official restriction<sup>450</sup>.

See also [Legal reform](#)

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## 13. Ethnic tension

### 13.1 Rise in ethnic tension

- 13.1.1 William Davidson and the British Embassy noted that the opening of the political space has allowed increased political assertiveness which has been based on regional, ethnic or nationalist views<sup>451 452</sup>. The Political section, British Embassy, also noted that ‘...the Government [was] being challenged to respond to these issues [ethnic tensions] in new ways without resorting to repressive tactics of the past.’<sup>453</sup>
- 13.1.2 The Horn of Africa researcher noted that reforms had brought a crumbling of security which had contributed to violence and ethnic tension<sup>454</sup>.
- 13.1.3 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted ‘the rise in ethnic tension is challenging to manage’<sup>455</sup>.

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### 13.2 Regional states

- 13.2.1 The Political section, British Embassy, noted: ‘There has been a general rise in ethnic nationalist sentiment in many of the regions, especially Oromia, Amhara and Tigray. Also, agitations for new states in SNNPR (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region).’<sup>456</sup>
- 13.2.2 The senior representative of OFC opined that for the Amhara there has been a nervousness because of past historical tension and violence between Oromos, Amharas and Tigrayans (post 1991 mass killings of the Amhara were cited as examples). The more recent Oromo armed group attacks (in Wollo and Shawa) brought this nervousness and fear to the surface, and tension rose<sup>457</sup>. Hassan Moalin, ONLF, also noted the tension between the Tigrayans, Amharas, and Oromos<sup>458</sup>.
- 13.2.3 The senior representative of the OFC and the British Embassy noted there had been a rise in ethnic tension in Oromia<sup>459 460</sup>. The legal expert noted there were tensions in border areas and the main issues surrounded rights to land. The source gave the examples of the Oromo/Amhara claims to Addis Ababa and the situation in Dera district (approximately 150km from

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<sup>450</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>451</sup> [William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019](#)

<sup>452</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>453</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>454</sup> [Horn of Africa Researcher, 10 September 2019](#)

<sup>455</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>456</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>457</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

<sup>458</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>459</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>460</sup> [Senior representative of OFC, 17 September 2019](#)

Addis), which predominantly contained ethnic Amhara but is included in Oromia<sup>461</sup>.

- 13.2.4 Hassan Moalin, ONLF, noted that, historically, for the Somali people issues have been over land. There have been conflicts between Somalis and the Afar, and more recent intensive fighting between armed groups at the Somali/Oromia border<sup>462</sup>. The Political section, British Embassy, noted there were still clashes between groups in the Somali Regional State despite the high-level peace deal<sup>463</sup>.
- 13.2.5 According to the Political section, British Embassy and DFID Ethiopia staff, the killing of two aid workers in Gambella region was as a result of ethnic tension in the area<sup>464 465</sup>. The British Embassy noted the [Gambella] town was divided along ethnicity lines (Anuak and Nuer) with reports of segregation and outbursts of violence in remote areas beyond Gambella town while DFID noted that Gambella contained a 'patchwork of armed groups.'<sup>466 467</sup>
- 13.2.6 Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, noted that in certain regions, the government has not been able to stop people declaring that different political groups could not enter the area, which had caused division. The same source noted:
- 'If you go to certain areas, e.g. Tigray region, the individual rights are good. But you go to other regions and people face discrimination in areas where they are in the minority. The Somali region seems relatively stable, the Afar region also, but in other places for example the Oromia region, there have been reports on property being seized, human rights abuses, and displacement of people. This is not what the federal government have said or planned, it is the local regional government are acting on their ethnic grouping. Generally, in my assessment the federal government is respecting individual rights. The instability comes from the local regional governments who have been complicit in abuses. Individuals who belong to different ethnic groups are acting by themselves.'<sup>468</sup>

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### 13.3 Internal displacement

- 13.3.1 The head of an international NGO noted: 'Most displacement is caused by ethnic tension and/or drought. Up until 2015 that's when things started bubbling up [in relation to] ethnic tension. And then it became an issue.'<sup>469</sup>
- 13.3.2 The Political section, British Embassy, stated: 'There are large numbers of IDPs in Ethiopia. A peak of around 3 million was hit earlier in the year, although this has started to decline. Some are due to climate change, but the

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<sup>461</sup> [Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>462</sup> [Hassan Moalin, ONLF, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>463</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>464</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>465</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>466</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September](#)

<sup>467</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>468</sup> [Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>469</sup> [Head of International NGO, 20 September 2019,](#)

majority are as a result of localised conflicts...'<sup>470</sup> DFID Ethiopia staff similarly noted the role communal violence played in displacement<sup>471</sup>.

- 13.3.3 Internally Displaced People was not included in the terms of reference (ToR) for the FFM but was raised by a number of sources. For more information on the situation for, and conditions and experience of IDPs, see [Annex D](#).

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## 14. Ethiopia/Eritrea relations

- 14.1.1 The Political section, British Embassy, and DFID noted that there was dialogue between Eritrea and Ethiopia a relationship building, but the peace deal had not been institutionalised<sup>472 473</sup>.
- 14.1.2 The Political section, British Embassy noted the positive development that the 'shoot to kill' policy at the Ethiopia/Eritrea border was no longer in force and there were people crossing between the two countries (albeit the border was not officially open)<sup>474</sup>.
- 14.1.3 The British Embassy and DFID also noted that there had been an increased inflow of people from Eritrea to Ethiopia since the peace deal, including a large number of men at national service age and unaccompanied children for family reunification<sup>475 476</sup>. The head of an International NGO noted that 80% of those interviewed in Shire entered Ethiopia for family reunification purposes<sup>477</sup>. The head of an International NGO stated there was very little reverse migration, i.e. from Ethiopia to Eritrea. According to the Political section, British Embassy, movement tended to be for trade, reunification or family visits<sup>478 479</sup>.
- 14.1.4 Refugees in Ethiopia was not included in the ToR for the FFM but was discussed by a number of sources. For more information on the situation for, and conditions and experience of refugees, see notes at [Annex D](#).

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<sup>470</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>471</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>472</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>473</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>474</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>475</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

<sup>476</sup> [DFID Ethiopia staff, 16 and 20 September 2019](#)

<sup>477</sup> [Head of International NGO, 20 September 2019.](#)

<sup>478</sup> [Head of International NGO, 20 September 2019.](#)

<sup>479</sup> [Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019](#)

# Annex A: Terms of reference (ToR)

## Topics

**The FFM will focus on the country situation since April 2018.**

### Overview of the current political climate

- Information on what is happening in government
- Security sector reforms

### Political opinion

- Opposition to state generally
  - Political groups/civil society/journalists
  - Ability to function
- Former designated terrorist organisations (with most focus on PG7)
  - Numbers, location, profile of members
  - Activities and ability to now participate in the political process
- Treatment post April 2018 including releases
  - State interest in the diaspora and activities overseas, i.e. those joining PG7, OLF membership in the UK
  - State interest in those returning to ETH - interest in past activities with PG7/OLF
- Protestors
  - Freedom to protest
  - State response to protests

### Race

- Oromo
  - Land disputes
  - State's ongoing interest in those who participated in the 2014/15/16 protests.
  - State and societal treatment of Oromo, including discrimination

### Secondary focus (if time allows)

- Amhara
  - State treatment of Amhara
- Ethnic conflict
  - Background and update to Oromos/Gedeos/Somali clashes
  - Reasons for rise in ethnic conflict since April 2018
- Eritrea/Ethiopia relations
- Changes since the end of no war, no peace
- Freedom of movement, border crossings

## Annex B: List of sources

1. Ambo University lecturers
2. Department for International Development (DFID) Ethiopia staff
3. Garoma B Wakessa, (Director General, Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa) (HRLHA)
4. Hassan Moalin, (Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) Foreign Secretary and Head of Addis Ababa Office On Federal Issues)
5. Head of an International NGO
6. Horn of Africa researcher
7. Legal expert and active critic
8. The Life and Peace Institute
9. Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) officers
10. One of the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) leaders
11. Political section, British Embassy, Addis Ababa
12. Senior representatives of Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (E-ZEMA)
13. Senior representative of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)
14. William Davison, Crisis Group
15. Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University

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# Annex C: FFM background explained to sources

## Home Office fact finding mission: background

Officials from the UK Home Office, the government department responsible immigration and asylum, are undertaking a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to Ethiopia-to better understand the political environment since April 2018.

We would therefore like to interview you.

If you kindly agree, we will:

- take detailed notes of the interview
- use the information you give in a report which will be placed on the Home Office website and made available to the public
- only publish information you provide with your consent
- also give you an opportunity to review the notes of the interview to ensure they are an accurate reflection of the conversation; and
- ask if you are willing to be identified as the source of the information you may provide. You may not wish to be publicly identified. If so, we will ask if you are willing to be identified in more general terms – for example, by the name of your organisation or in another way.

We may also ask about the background to your organisation (where appropriate) and your role to help us understand the context of the information you provide.

The FFM team will be seeking to look at the political environment since April 2018.

More information about the Home Office can be found on our website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office>

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# Annex D: Notes from sources

Horn of Africa researcher, 10 September 2019, Skype interview

How would you describe the progress made under Abiy?

It is a period of flux. Transition, it's difficult to know but that is probably the most appropriate word. From April 2018– April/May 2019 the signs were very positive. First time in the last decade that we have seen concrete human rights steps taken. Thousands of political detainees released and 2 prisons closed. The detention facility Maekelawi closed last year, a few months before Abiy came into office, and was open to the public last week, treatment and conditions were bad and most high-profile political detainees were detained there. The closure was symbolic. Pre the last 2 months we were receiving many less reports of detention and mistreatment in detention. There was no space for political opponents until Abiy came in to power.

In terms of really tackling the system that was in place, what we did see and what has contributed to violence and ethnic tensions, is that the security has crumbled and has created a vacuum for about a year. We have now seen deployment of the army again where we had seen this vacuum. We are keeping it on the radar. The army, there have been changes at the top but not any clear security sector reforms. No one really knows what is going on in the command posts, all that is very unclear at the moment. We saw a breakdown of security apparatus at many levels but we are starting to see a reassertion from the federal level which could be good or bad, a mixed bag.

The government is dealing with many pressures and potential destabilising actions from many sides. It's complicated to bring accountability into this but needs to happen. We have seen the use of the Anti -Terrorism law again [ATP] since the June [2019] violence, it was a tool that was used against political opponents previously, and people are being investigated under this law post-coup. There are concerns with this as it allows for long detentions etc.

We are receiving reports of a counter-insurgency campaign against alleged [Oromo Liberation Front] OLF in Oromia and reports of arbitrary arrests and destruction of civilian property raising concerns about lack of changes in practice by the military.

What is/was the impact of the coup attempt? Did it slow Abiy down? Is the use of the ATP a direct response to that?

It's difficult to know why they have been using the anti-terrorism law since June [2019]. In a few cases they are making use of the remand provisions in that law. Is this to allow time to gather evidence? They had committed to reforming that anti-terrorism law so it's difficult to know why they are now again using it.

In terms of reform, things slowed down. There were reforms in [the civil society organisation] CSO law, appointment of figures who were seen as opposition in the past. In relation to the creation of the reconciliation commission there are questions about why certain officials were appointed, they had no clear relevant experience in this area and the mandate is unclear so, so far, seems to be mainly a PR exercise.

In the Somali region we have seen some effort to move forward and to see those responsible held to account. Concern that the process may be stalled at federal level.

Hate speech – we are very concerned about the rise of hate speech both online and

offline and how it is contributing to ethnic violence. But at the same time, have raised concerns about the plans to draft a hate speech law. Concerns about whether it is needed and concerns about how this law could be misused, especially if no reform of the checks and balances. We need to keep check of the use of these laws.

I would say yes, the alleged coup attempt, was a wake-up call.

IDPs – we have concerns in respect of them, they have been displaced and then forced to go home. We are investigating how they were forced home, and the level of coercion used, but it's important to underline that in in the Ethiopian context being told to go home by the authorities can in itself be enough for people to feel they have no choice but to return.

The underlying reasons for violence which led to the displacement and grievances haven't been dealt with an I wonder whether willingness to reform and tackle underlying problems is really there. It was the period when dealing with Sidama so a difficult time and much more of a balancing act. Response have been mixed and raised concerns about where going [in terms of government response to political/ security challenges].

Are you able to give a sense of scale of the use of the ATP?

No. We are only aware of investigations under the law since the June [2019] violence. There are a number of journalists and [human rights] HR lawyers who monitor trials and the Addis standard may be worth talking to. CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists) keeping track of journalists and due process and those arrested.

Security sector reforms - Have you any information on arrests in relation to accountability for torture and corruption? Amnesty previously cited 'over 60 high level government officials' arrested on charges of torture and corruption by the end of 2018. Has there been progress on this?

We don't believe there has been much movement on these. [Human Rights Watch (HRW)] attended some of the trials in Somali region in relation to the jail there. There high-level personnel and the Liyu police have been taken to court and for human rights abuses. But no, I don't have a good sense of numbers. Abdi Iley – former head of the Somali region – is also on trial, but only for his responsibility in a very specific set of incidents, and not for the grave abuses of the decade in which he was in power.

To what extent does the government have control over the security forces?

It's a difficult question. Internal dynamics are difficult. Harder now than any time before.

Can you give information on political groups and their ability to operate now?

It 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.

Not many groups are getting their act together to formalise and develop a presence throughout the country, which is key for the national elections. Previously, there was no space for political opponents to form, political parties were decimated, no space for a political culture and so very difficult to create that culture over-night, become motivated and strategic over-night. Gap of new political groups and a political culture

that is not going to change overnight and we are not seeing that shift, so while there may not be barriers in place per se from the govt the historical decimation manifests itself today.

New electoral law – we haven't researched that yet although it is important to monitor. Expectation is there are factors which are directly disadvantaging groups not part of the coalition. Although we don't know what will happen to the coalition. NaMA [National Movement of Amhara] party appeared to be the most organised although it has reportedly been hard hit since the June violence.

Is there, or has there been, a deliberate blocking of parties forming or are there bureaucratic hurdles?

It's difficult to know and there hasn't been much consultation around the law for civil society this might well have been the same for opposition [that there was limited consultation for the Ethiopian Election, Political Parties Registration and Election Ethics law, 24 August 2019], but we haven't looked into this and so it would require follow-up. Is that due to timing, lack of experience or deliberate – don't know but worth asking.

State media is still reluctant to criticise the government. Level playing fields during election? I would be surprised if the state media is willing to give everyone a fair chance.

What about NGO or CSO's ability to operate?

Media - we haven't seen a massive proliferation of more independent media outlets. Addis Standard has been trying for a while and have continued to do so. The return of activists and journalists from the diaspora meant we hoped to see more investigative journalism but it hasn't happened. Ethiopia Insight is trying to create a space for Eth journos but not seen a proliferation.

Civil society - in some ways are joining the govt so you have them talking the talk of civil society but not actually acting in the way civil society does. Those you would expect to be engaging in a civil society way are not. Human rights issues to stay alive? The EHRC are they going to be do more and re-assert their presence across the country? Still too early to say. National HRC are they going to engage?

Monitoring of returnees/ deportees – one of our concerns has been no method to follow up on return.

HRW in Ethiopia - went in twice this year, the first time since 2011, Addis Ababa and the Somali region. Difficult to know, the context of research is different to the past. In the past the federal government didn't want us there and now there are a lot of different people who might not want us or have differing agendas, political parties etc so have to navigate that. In terms of official restriction we have not seen that yet.

Official blocks or early days and evolving?

Sources interviewed during the Danes' visit to Ethiopia in May 2018<sup>480</sup> suggested 'many of the 20,000 prisoners who have been released by the Government over the past years were probably student activists'. To what extent has the student 'political' movement evolved under Abiy?

Students, in the past university students and especially Oromo, tried to use

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<sup>480</sup> Danish Immigration Service, Ethiopia Political situation and treatment of opposition (p.16), September 2018, [url](#)

universities as a space in which to express themselves and as a result there were clampdowns (see tweet 2 days ago ref Maekelawi Oromo student). Universities were spaces where they tried to exert cultural expression if not political. Protests from 2015 initially mainly involved school students (not all of them children per se given that many students go to school/start school late), more so than university students. Later, it spread on and off to university campuses.

Qeerroo – we don't know who they are, how organised or who they report to where is that at now? I don't have a good sense. Something to look into.

Can you provide any details on advertising of political or opposition groups (e.g. on TV)? Rallies? Meetings? Fund-raising? Leafleting? Campaigning?

Not looking into that at the moment. No information.

Former designated terrorist organisations - What are your estimates on the current capacity of and support for PG7? Do you have any information numbers, location, profile of members of PG7 and OLF?

PG7, are basically dead, in fact I believe they formally disbanded the organization. Its supporters have been amalgamated into other organizations-NAMA, etc.

OLF still retains broad support amongst older Oromo, but I believe it's dropping. Allowing Daoud Ibsa back into Ethiopia has put the ball in his court so to speak, and he has not handled it well according to many Oromo, and his support has dropped. Between 8-10k fighters returned associated with OLF, a relatively small percentage of the returned fighters are still in the bush fighting.

In relation to the OLF what is the difference between the OLF and OLA?

Dynamics. Where people were in exile and were OLF and are now back, what are they now? Distanced from OLF its very complicated.

Sometimes, they are used interchangeably, but 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.

To what extent has the OLF moved away from violence?

Don't know. On a daily basis there was information on arrests of people. Couple of hundred in prison for a couple of months for rehabilitation who have been released. But there have also been reports of burning of property and arrests. Are these in response to specific acts of violence? hard to say at the moment.

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.

There have been reports of integrating OLF combatants into the armed forces. Any news/update on this?

Complicated. But basically, there were a number of fighters that after much negotiation agreed to be rehabilitated, trained and placed into the security forces. That hasn't gone well from what I understand with lack of food, lack of structure, and many of the former fighters being frustrated and just leaving.

Initially, one small faction of OLF that has splintered some time ago was welcomed

back and immediately they became part of the Oromia regional security forces, but after a few months their leader got frustrated and left. Not clear to me if they are back there or not.

Treatment post April 2018 – we saw you had been tweeting about Maekelawi prison yesterday. Do you have information on the profile(s) and numbers of people released? There were a reported 13,000 prisoners being pardoned. Any update on this?

It was an investigation detention centre. Didn't spend years there. It was mainly Oromo there, low profile and now one knew about them or at least not outside Oromia but most were moved quickly. I didn't get a good sense of numbers. Facility used and then moved to prison in Addis. Mainly individuals from Oromia held here (Somali in jail Ogaden).

Are you aware of the process when a person gets released? Are they issued anything? Made to sign anything? Are there ongoing conditions attached to release?

Pre-Abiy it varied a lot, but rarely did it involve the courts. During Oromo protests, it was usually a verbal promise not to oppose the govt and then release. Sometimes they signed something but not usually. Sometimes had to check in at police station daily, sometimes told not to leave town, etc. but over the years [and perhaps because of the numbers arrested] there seemed to be less restrictions on those released.

It was definitely the case in Maekelawi, sign something and renounce behaviour. Example of an individual who was pressured into working for the government and monitored on return. Went home and harassed and fled to Kenya.

Ongoing pressure on those in Maekelawi. It was about confessions. People would be moved from cells, the worst cell for investigation to put pressure on to confess.

There were a reported 13,000 prisoners being pardoned. Any update on this? Anything they had to do or were given for release?

We don't believe that released detainees/ prisoners were given release/ discharge documents.

To what extent does the ETH Govt. take interest in the activities of diaspora (UK or other), particularly those involved in politics, and especially those in PG7 or OLF?

Haven't received new reports of new surveillance tools being used since the new government [have] come in to power. Although we might not have been monitoring as closely as before, but we haven't been receiving reports and we had before. It was a big issue, including by certain regional governments as well - previously monitoring of protests outside embassies abroad and arresting relatives back home etc. Very much part of the previous government. The diaspora remains a major actor but no evidence of it currently happening and evidently a lot of the diaspora have returned so probably not seen as being as much need to monitor them.

Are Oromo automatically assumed to support OLF or other opposition groups?

Pre-Abiy, definitely, very rare for an Oromo who was arrested not to be accused of being OLF. It was also how some, although most never made it to court, were tried under the ATP. Interesting in the context of the OLF counter insurgency and Abiy favouring Oromo. From what we are seeing there is a worrying trend in counter insurgency. I don't have the answers.

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## Garoma B. Wakessa, Director General, Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA), 16 September 2019

### Introduction: Current priorities; aims/objectives of HRLHA

I first created human rights organisation in 1996 in Addis Ababa with other people. At that time I used to work for the a newspaper called **Urjii** as a Director of a publishing company.

### Personal and organisation's background

The Transition period of Ethiopia started in 1991 after the brutal Military government has been removed from power by rebel fighters. Three major political organisations (EPRDF, OLF and EPLF) have created the transition period charter. After one year, (in 1992) the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) who was leading the Transition period pushed pressure on major opposition parties, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) to eliminate them from the transition government.

As these political organizations left the transition government, the members and supporters of both political organizations (OLF & ONLF) have been picked from different places and arrested, tortured, killed by the EPRDF government which has continued for over four years until we created human rights organization Human Rights League (HRL) in 1996.

The EPRDF government has refused to register our new human rights organization, the HRL though all required documents have been submitted to the Ministry of Justice in Ethiopia. However, we did not give up. ETH has in law that if an NGO submits a document and gets no response in 2 months, they can carry on. We used this as an opportunity and continued our activity reporting to the government every step we were taking.

After 8 months of operation as a general Secretary of HRL, I was arrested by the EPRDF Security people from the office of HRL in 1997. All HRL office documents, equipment including computers and faxing machines and printers have been confiscated.

All my co-workers at HRL and at Urjii Newspaper and others Oromos have been picked from their home and work places have been taken to jail. I have been arrested the first 8 months in the infamous torture chamber called Maikelawi, then transferred to other penitentiary for the rest of three years. After 4 years in prison I was released with no conviction. No compensation, no apology, nothing.

After two weeks of my release from jail, I received a call from one of Amnesty International staff from London, UK and have been told to leave the country immediately before my re-arrest by the security.

I fled to Kenya, and I got asylum in Canada after six months in Kenya. I saw what was happening to Oromos and others who fled their country from fear of persecution from Ethiopia to Kenya. While I was in Kenya I witnessed that the Ethiopian government security people enter into Kenya and abduct any Ethiopian citizen from the Capital City of Kenya, Nairobi.

It was strange for me how a security of one country cross the sovereign border of other country and does such illegal activity.

Later I realized from my informants in other countries such as Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia the same thing is possible for Ethiopian security to enter any neighbour

country and arrest its opponent members.

I got to Canada in 2002 and I decided to continue with my commitment to fight for the human rights victims in Ethiopia being in Canada. I created my plans and had to wait for three years to get my citizenship and then start this organisation. I then re-established the Human Rights League (HRL) as Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA) in 2007. I added "Horn of Africa" to the name of the previous organisation, HRL when I was in Kenya thinking to defend the citizens who left their country and still under the attack of Ethiopian Security in neighbour countries.

I did defend them by writing letters to those neighbour countries. HRLHA worked closely with other international Human Rights Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch from the started in 2007. In few years of our Activity HRLHA attracted attention of different governmental office and governmental agencies such AU, UN, and EU. In recognition of our commitment of defend Human Rights in Ethiopia and Horn of Africa HRLHA the UN ECOSOC awarded HRLHA with Special Consultative Status in 2011 which enabled HRLHA to work with UN Human Rights council and UN subsidiary bodies on Human Rights issues.

In the past twenty-seven years HRLHA tried to expose all kinds of human rights abuses in Ethiopia. After three decades with the commitment of Oromo youths (QEERROO) organized anti-government reparation beginning from 2014 to 2018 without stopping the Ethiopian people unfolded protest with demanding equality, justice and freedom forced the EPRDF government to make change in its polices.

The EPRDF government was forced to bring some changes such as releasing political prisoners, allowing the outlawed political organization to return to Ethiopia and operate.

Using this opportunity, I returned to Ethiopia in 2019. The government and PM Abiy Ahmed have promised many times to the human rights commissioner Mr. Zeid Raad Al Hussein to change human rights situation in Ethiopia.

After few months of enjoying PM promises to improve human rights in the country facts on the ground did not coincide with the promise.

The government security started to re-arrest youth, and others who demanded for the PM promise to be practical.

This makes the human rights situation in Ethiopia once more difficult. I think concerning human rights that Ethiopia is one step forward, two steps backwards. The changes happened through a difficult time. Many people lost their lives, according to our document over 7500 people have been killed in Oromia during the protest of 2014-2018 which was before Abiy came to power.

Produced reports on land-grabbing in Oromia and the capital city Finfinne or Addis Abba continued.

### Overview of the current political climate

A lot has changed since Abiy has come into power, according to our document 94,000 political prisoners were in prison in 2016. 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.

Government opposition, such as OLF, Ginbot 7 and others have come back to Ethiopia. The government also have admitted torturing has happened by the Government in the past 27 years and he admitted that what the government did was

terrorism. We again accepted this action. The government are really accepting what they have done in the past. But what happens next? There are some negative changes, people are starting to be arrested on different issues again, the OLF members and supporters are those who are arrested.

### Ability to function

We are now registered as a local NGO. We had registered in on July 2, 2019 with Agency for Civil Society Organizations Agency within 2 weeks.

Now we as an organisation we are at the very start, we have a problem with financing. At the moment we do not have an office in Addis. But we are finding funding from different countries to start our activity. When we open our office in Addis we suspect more government interest, however we are able to open smaller offices in regional places to get first hand reports.

Regarding the political change in the country, I saw, there is not really a strong command chain from the government/high places down to the people in charge daily. Most of the political uncertainty takes in regional states of different zones. The problem comes from regional places not from high up in the government. The problem is a structural issue and maybe a systematic way to stop other organisations from functioning, there is a loose connection.

I cannot see for the Oromo where this country is going to go. I want to know where we are going in this country. Each day what is happening is different, nothing show continuity, what started today will not continue tomorrow. There is a different direction. The HRLHA has been registered to monitor the coming election in Ethiopia, we shall see and let you know.

### Scale of arrests from that [celebration of OLF return] incident

On the day OLF returned Home on September 15, 2018 among over 4 million people came to meet the OLF at the Meskel square. over 150 people were arrested

After weeks of OLF returned to Ethiopia, the military commander of the OLF Mr. Gamachu Ayana who came with other OLF leaders have been arrested with others and are now in prison. The arrests did not follow due process, I visited him Mr. Gamachu Ayana and he did not know why he had been arrested.

### Profile of people arrested

As I stated above most arrestees are OLF higher officials including Mr. Gamachu Ayana who is military commander and others were supporters.

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.

### Detention

They have started arresting again, 8 months ago 20,000 were arrested, they have now been released. There are 5,000 prisoners in Sankele camp in Ambo. The concentration camp is a military training camp. I know this number because I visited the people in the prison. This is a small number. There are a lot of people arrested and put into concentration camps, sometimes they are kept in the police stations. A lot of people who have been arrested are OLF. People have been disappeared in the past 27 years beginning 1992 were kept in Tigray regional state, there is no way to

confirm this, but they are Oromos and others.

2 weeks ago, I went to visit prisoners in Sankele, Ambo. However, the officials claim there are no prisoners in the camp. They claim in the concentration camps and they are training the people, but they will not say what they are training them for.

I confirmed from one prisoner I met with him in hospital told me there are 4,001 people mostly women, and family members in Sankele Concentration camp.

There are 8 mothers, and each have their 5 children. These people came from west Wollega, more are from Gujii, southern Oromia. The government will say no one is in prison but they will say they are in training.

#### Source of the 20,000 number

I spoke to people who were there. I got this from the prisoner. There are 4,001 prisoners in Ambo Sankele only. I went there two weeks ago. I was not allowed to go there. I was told there are no prisoners here. They are in training camp.

A man who was arrested with me in 1996 and now rearrested and whom I met him in hospital told me there are 4,001 prisoners in Senkele concentration camp. As he told me, there are 80 couples – husband and wife. There are around 8 women with multiple children. These people came from Wollega, which is in the west, and there is a clash between them and the military. Some are from the south and west of Guji.

#### Location of the camps

Yes, I can share that.

There are also thousands of people missing. I have asked the Govt. to let the families know what has happened.

Prisons or Police Training Camps used as prison in Oromia:

1. Police Station #3 - located at Addis Ababa near Maikelawi, North of the City Council of Addis Ababa
2. Kaliti Prison - Located at the South part of the City
3. Kilinto Prison - Located at the South part of the city
4. Tolay Training camp (used also as prison) - located at Western part of Oromia Jimma Road (near Tulu Bole Town)
5. Ziway Training Camp (used also as Prison) - located at southern part of Oromia (Shahemene Road) Sankele Training Camp (used also as prison) - located south of Ambo Town

#### Who is reportedly detaining people [in the training camps]?

Central Govt. police. Special Oromo Forces, with help of central Govt.

#### Reason state detaining OLF supporters when de-proscribed

As I see it, OLF has the majority of supporters in Oromia and if it was allowed to operate fully, then this government has no place. I guess majority of Oromos support the OLF. There will be no ODP/OPDO if they are allowed to OLF operate tomorrow. And if they lose the forthcoming election, they – the Oromos who are part of EPDRF will be accountable for what they've done in the last 27 years against Oromos.

## OLF

All Oromos are counting themselves they are directly or indirectly members or supporters of OLF.

Currently, there are clashes between Government and local people in the west Wollega region. The fact is, more than 200 houses have been burnt in the south and this is because they are supporters of the OLF wing, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). A lot of people are being killed in Wallaga and Gujii around where OLA is operating. These regions are under an unlawful state of emergency. These are illegal because the government did not bring it through parliament.

Sidama have demanded to have their own state, and a month ago there were clashes and now they are under a state of emergency.

I know these people, the Oromo people want 2 things maybe 3, they want power. They want free and fair elections. Sometimes the government think they want to separate from Ethiopia, but this is not true, no one wants separation. Some people are afraid that Oromo have some power they will dominate the country, but I do not think so.

### Oromo protests 2014 - 18 – state interest

Most of the people who were arrested were members of Qeerroo, the engineers of the change now we see in Ethiopia. They are the ones who are victimised in prison now. Qeerroo organization is the youth wing Oromo young people (National Oromian Youth Movement for Freedom and Democracy).

Recently the Govt. arrested the Qeerroo Radio operators. The security went to their office 3 days ago and confiscated media equipment and arrested 5 journalists of Qeerroo radio. This is the office in Addis. Can't find them; they're in an unknown place.

Most of the prominent people are Qeerroo who are linked to the protests are in prison or in an unknown place.

OLF are allowed to register for the election, but they are not allowed to open regional offices.

### Issue with opening the regional office?

Not really command chain between the higher officials and the lower officials. Nobody gave the instruction that they couldn't open. The problem is in the region where they are trying to open. Bureaucratic, structural issues but it is stopping them from functioning.

### How much do you think the Govt. associate Oromo with OLF?

I know these people. The Govt. knows these people. OLF and Oromo people demand three things. Equability, Democracy and Justice.

Other people say that Oromos want to separate from ETH. But this is absolutely not true.

Oromo have the Gadaa system. The indigenous Oromo Democracy. This won't allow Oromo to put other people to push away, the Gadaa system promote inclusiveness not separation or exclusiveness.

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## Department for International Development (DFID) – Ethiopia staff, 16 September 19 and 20 September 2019

### Overview of the current political climate and progress under Abiy

We assess the commitment from government to human rights, we have just finished our second partnership principle assessment (PPA) which we consider as successful. Opened up political rights - the [Civil Society Organisation] CSO has been law passed, media law is almost finalised and sent to the council, terrorism law has been sent to parliament. Human rights law has been revised. The process has also been inclusive, engaging.

Concrete steps have been taken, for example in terms of what the government is trying to fix. We must make sure it is in line with the constitution, the work the government is doing is on a voluntary basis. For example, a team will give you some ideas on human rights, this second partnership principle round has been an open-minded process. There are a lot of liberal laws, the government said to do what you want and to make it in line with international laws. I am 100% happy with the outcome.

State orchestrated violence was reduced. The government have looked at institutions, and we have not seen a lot of push back on laws proposed. There has been an opening up of a democratic space. We have seen a rise of horizontal violence (Groups vs groups), not from the state down.

### Security sector reforms

Not done by government office, but by legal advisers.

We have seen a lot of reduction in state perpetrated violence, human rights groups have reported that reports of torture have gone down, there are no recent reports of journalists being arrested. The number of murders committed by security forces have decreased, however there has been a decrease in protection by state, this is an area we are disappointed in, a lack of protection.

There are 3 million IDPs, there some reports of displacements and killings.

In terms of the institution, we have seen better commitment from government, for example the appointment of human rights institutions. We are disappointed in the security protection decrease, we don't really have a constitutional mandate, so the enforcement of human rights has been weak.

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.

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.

Accountability has not been depoliticised, there has been some accountability given for human right violations but not to the level that we expected.

Closure of Maekelawi prison is a good commitment to human rights from the government. However, there are still areas where the government need to commit more to.

### Effect of reforms on day-to-day

There is an element that change from the top is filtering down the system, but this is an Addis centric feeling. It's good for Addis. You may be more likely to be pickpocketed now, but that's as much because the police now know you can't just arrest people. Need evidence. More respect for the rule of law.

But the extent to which this is playing out in the regions differs. Blossoming of a regional police force however they are the military. They are in camouflage, I would not recognise them as police but more of a paramilitary force. You have a sense across the board that there is a new system and regime but there are a lot of errors within this as forces act how they want.

The old systems have been dissected/removed, but a new one has not been put in place, it means security/police do not have a mandate on how they can act. Lack of knowledge/settlement e.g. police asking 'how do you want us to do our work?'.

In Tigray there is still evidence that security is working but, in the centre, there has been a major assassination [June 2019]. There are a lot of pros and cons. There is no idea of what you should be doing and how you should be doing it.

### Impact of the coup attempt

Yes, it has spooked Govt. It has slowed them down a little. But people who did it were very naïve.

Lot of democratic groups aren't really democratic.

In Oromia, there is still fighting in certain areas, but the military are doing a lot of human rights campaigns in the last few months.

Opening up of the democratic space was based on the belief that everyone would act responsibly, but they haven't.

The coup attempt, in my own analysis it is part of the political sphere, whoever is in charge thought proliferation of government would be good?

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.

### Assessment of political groups' – incl. former terrorist groups – ability to function

Depends how you compare. Looking at comparison to a few years ago, there is so much progress. But compared to international standards, still some restrictions – some by Govt; most by groups.

OLF have said their movements are being restricted. But this is from a spike in groups not government restrictions. Eskinder Nega's group have been refused offices.

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.

However, 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.

### Targeting of Oromos as OLF?

10 years ago then, yes. Now the OLF has a proud flag everywhere. In an ODP

office, you'll find someone with an OLF flag. 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.

Targeting of 'Shene', the head of this faction is now in Addis preparing for an election.

If you are on the Somali border, where geographically there are not a lot of Oromos - maybe. If you are in the Oromo areas it would be more of surprise to see people being picked up by security forces based on being linked to OLF. These are 2 regional states. It is a matter of perspective.

In mixed towns and border regions, people who have been living in SRS [Somali Regional State] for generations for example and look Oromo (they do not need to speak the language), may be picked up by local security forces. It is just regional. Doubt in Addis they are going to pick up OLF people but people in SRS probably yes. The issues in SRS are complex and will change weekly.

### Evidence around Tigrayans being targeted?

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. You will hear a constant fear that there were so many Tigrayans, and this is playing out in violence across the country.

### Forth coming elections and the new election law

It is a good law, it was drafted by independents and university lecturers, a lot of people want this. If you are a national party and the population of the country is 100 million, needing 10,000 signatures is proportionate. It will ensure that parties would have constituencies.

This law is making elections fair, free and competitive and contributes to the constitution. The law is a problem to groups who do not have a constitution. A lot of legal and nationalist groups do not have an issue with this law. They got the big parties together after the law was drafted and they – e.g. OLF, G7 – are fine with it.

Ethiopia is a huge country, we have a lot of elections, for example national, regional and local elections all happening. The law may be a bit forward at the moment but in its entirety, it is a good law. It has laid the foundation for a democratic future.

The big parties will not have any problems with this law, the problem that could arise is going to be the election is going to be contested. In the political wheel we have a free and fair election, but I do not trust whoever is in power to relinquish their power.

Abiy only committed to the election a month ago, the democratic process in this state has weakened so they are now starting to commit to an election. Not clear if a coalition will take place it is just unknown, in the next 2-3 months we will have more clarity with the new registration of parties and coalitions. It is a huge thing.

## Release of political prisoners

Depends on how you define it, who is a political prisoner? I would say most political prisoners have been released. The major ones have definitely been released, every region have released many prisoners. People get released and we don't know about it. Then every region has released people. e.g. in Oromia, they released lots of people who were arrested in connection with the protests. Don't know names but know numbers.

But re-arrests have happened, this is in connection to the assassinations. Can'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. It would depend on journalists or people who are reporting these numbers. The official number of released political prisoners is actually lower than what it says it is. Then there is also a number that are mixed in with administrative detention pending trial etc. and there are lengthy detention times which make people think they are political prisoners.

It then gets in to how long does it become before it looks, feels and is political. The numbers of prisoners released are conflicted, due to a lot of re-arrests. The numbers who have been released may not be true and may be lower.

Also a case that people detained aren't political prisoners but are painted that way (e.g. Tigrayans)

The scale is different. Much lower.

## Protests

Regionalism has increased because of Amhara and Oromo tension. In the past 2 demonstrations, the first one was objection to allocation of resources. And in Amhara a lot of demos against Abiy and Oromo taking power.

The number of protests has decreased.

The Addis Ababa issue is they should have had an election, but it didn't and then the government appointed an Oromo man as interim mayor. 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 history of protests in the last 2-3 years, it was a political plan. 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.

## State interest in those involved in historic (2014/2015/16) protests

The state is still interested in some of the people in the Oromo protests, but the central committee of region has a lot of activists who participated in the protest and are now in the committee. They are in the local state structure in Oromia region.

There's an under-reporting of those Oromia activists – those in OLF, OFC – we are getting reports of these, though they are difficult to substantiate.

Bit of a breaking up of the old structural groups. Those co-opted into the new system are ok; but those outside it feel left out.

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.

There are rising concerns from Oromo protesters.

We think the OLF was not part of the street movement but was more of an armed group.

The OLF leadership is here and they are having political meetings. OLF are being optimistic about how these meetings will go.

#### Extent to which OLF has laid down arms

Unclear. OLF has split into 6-7 different factions. Gives interviews, press conferences.

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.

#### OLF fighters joining the security forces.

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. For Ginbot 7 they agreed to go to camp and train. The former head of the group was given money for this. Abiy asked for a lot of money from financiers to support this.

We don't think this of the ONLF. The Somali region said they would do it separately and not through the DDR process. That is why you are seeing more integration there. In the Somali region it is essentially payment for being under control of the state. It is not the formal way we would want DDR. The process is old school, I would say they are not disarming and integrating these groups. If people are not being separated from each other but rather just put into security forces, their ideology remains. A lot of people are still armed, so disarmament is not really a thing.

#### Ethnic conflict

Oromia - It is not military to military violence, it is intercommunal violence/fighting such as tit for tat fighting. There is a fear that it could escalate by not having a military presence close by.

In Oromia, there is still a military command post which started as a military action against the OLF. The government put this in place. We have around 5 command posts and one of these is in Oromia and some around the Somali border. There is a military presence there. But is not a violent situation we do not consider the scale high.

Ethiopia has had the largest IDP displacement of people by conflict in the world over the last 18 months, the displacement has since greatly decreased. Displacement is complex situation. Concerns about some of the returning people being forced and it

is considered not voluntary.

People have returned because security has improved but some have been forced to return to places considered unsafe.

The blocking of humanitarian access, really reduces the amount of info on the narrative of forced return. Issue in Gambella with humanitarian aid workers but there are some questions about this.

The person who was put in charge of SRS [Somali Regional State] was not elected but he is very close to Abiy. This area is still problematic. This area may change dramatically and fast. You may not see displacement. Central police are a long way from village to disperse violence. In the villages (where the kebele has authority) there are 2 armed guards who are given money to guard there, and they are subject to corruption.

See people picked up by Sec. Services. E.g. [Save the Children] handed out cash in Somali region are being picked up by Oromo security forces for funding terrorism.

Liyu police may have picked up those with an Oromo name.

### Eritrea/Ethiopia relations

The rapprochement has not been institutionalised. There is still an inflow of refugees. Even if they close borders they are still coming across from Eritrea. You see Eritreans in Mekelle and the numbers are huge. A lot of Tigr[a]yans have done trade since the border has been open. You can trade over the border, as in, you go to the border and pass the goods over but not people, that is the extent of it.

A lot of unease as they keep closing parts, it is a long border. You cannot close/man all the border. There is talk of a signature for trade and people, but I do not see this happening soon.

### Humanitarian - background

DfID ETH humanitarian advisor. Refugees and migrants. Manage the UK's program. Cover forced displacement into, and out of, ETH.

Provide care and maintenance to refugees in camps, including to children and women who survived [sexual – gender based violence] S/GBV. Refugee existence in ETH comes through a parallel delivery system with support provided not by line ministries but through the [Government of Ethiopia] GoE's refugee agency. Trying to change this and to promote integration of refugees into Ethiopian society hence the UK's refugee work in Ethiopia includes a commitment to build health, education and sanitation services in communities that host refugees. In Gambella for example we have created a neo-natal ward in the hospital. Serves refugees and local community.

Also working on programmes looking to address the risks associated with irregular migration and to promote regular migration. Thinking about what sort of information do would-be migrants are faced with (i.e. do they know how dangerous the route to and within Yemen is? What sort of information do they need to make the journey potentially less risky)? Also: what are the services and alternatives they need in Ethiopia so they don't feel the need to migrate overseas.

Been helping ETH negotiate migratory bilateral arrangements with some of the Gulf states. Strengthen regular migration.

### Returnees to Ethiopia

Over the last 2 years, approx. 350,000 Ethiopians have been deported back to

Ethiopia from Saudi Arabia, they have all come from a range of different areas within the country. Unaccompanied and separated children make up roughly 10% of deportees. Deportees entered Saudi Arabia illegally. And deportees are returned to Addis Ababa's Bole airport in an appalling state – some have tested positive for cholera and others report having been tortured and mistreated whilst held in detention centres in Saudi Arabia. A small number of deportees have died upon return to Addis Ababa owing to a lack of access to health care whilst in detention in Saudi Arabia.

According to testimony gathered by humanitarian actors, deportees cite violence and insecurity in their communities as reasons motivating their decision to leave Ethiopia. That was a key driver of them leaving with the perception that they would be able to better themselves economically another important key driver. UN agencies who are seeing more waves of people returning, people who previously left for a range of reasons such as political and intimidation from within their areas. It is also important to note a huge number of people leaving are economic migrants for futures in the Gulf states.

Insecurity in South Sudan continues to push bona fide refugees into Ethiopia.

The government and the UN are now using biometric techniques to register refugees. In theory this system should allow the UN to track the movement of refugees within and out of Ethiopia but only if refugees seek to access support from the UN in a new location other than where they were originally registered.

Setting up the registration (with the UN), to ensure that people can be identified. Similarly, when people register in, say, Tigray – then move on to Addis – we can better understand those secondary movements.

When the migrants from Saudi talk to the UN about returns, they talk about the violence in their region.

### Eritreans in Ethiopia:

The peace deal has seen a rise in the numbers. We're still seeing a large number of young men of NS age. We are also seeing a large number of children – incl. unaccompanied children many of whom are travelling to Ethiopia to be reunited with family members either here or elsewhere.

Many Eritrean refugees who enter Ethiopia access humanitarian assistance for an initial period but then stop doing so. We assess that some may have self-settled in local Ethiopian communities but others are likely to have migrated outside of the country (with the likelihood that some might have been trafficked).

### Situation with South Sudanese refugees

With the border with South Sudan, we are seeing something of a yo-yo effect. Refugees are moving between Ethiopia and South Sudan. They are coming and going back – possibly to establish the situation and to determine if returns might be possible. Sustainable conditions are not in place for the safe and dignified return of refugees to South Sudan – **[addition by source - for the official UNHCR position see <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cb4607c4.html>]**. Spontaneous and temporary returns might see refugees returning to South Sudan to collect things of value such as cattle or to perhaps visit or collect family to bring them back to Ethiopia.

### Killing of development workers in Gambella

There was a killing 2 weeks ago where 2 humanitarian staff in Gambella were killed,

this was indicative of the rise in ethnic tension in Ethiopia and the regions. First time the refugee response has been affected in this way.

The situation in Wollega really highlights this rise in ethnic tension as well. Unless there are real measures put in place to bring perpetrators to justice – or to have confidence in the state to deal with these situations equally and fairly – then this will continue. Unless those tensions are addressed, that may well have an influence on people's migration choices.

## IDPs

The ethnic violence has been hard to follow but has been bubbling over the years, at the moment 3.1 million displacements. It is very difficult to understand how people can return to places, there is increasing instability with security forces and unidentifiable forces fighting and attacking communities.

Extent of armed groups causing displacement:

In Gambella, it's a patchwork of different armed groups. The OLF is splintered.

Communal violence is the cause of the displacement of people. The government have pushed returns and we know they are not voluntary.

The government states there are no more IDPs. The government are trying to make this issue go away. They have not gone up to the displaced people with a gun to their head whilst saying leave and go home, it is more of the physical stuff such as dismantling detention centres and providing buses to take back.

Security has been improved in parts of the country, but lot of it down to mobilising militias – which brings its own challenges.

## Current situation

The government are trying to push through a lot of reforms, especially economic processes which are trying to take shape but this takes a long time.

The situation on the ground for people is really difficult, high inflation is up 20%.

New president in SRS [Somali Regional State] has done some really good work.

Increasingly thinking about how we work with the regions if this [ethnic tensions/security concerns] continues. In Gambella the relief operation has been shut down for two weeks. Fabric of the state so thin there anyway no option but to. Health centres destroyed and children are out of education due inter communal conflict and being IDPs.

Govt was switching services off, i.e. water, to 'encourage' returns and centres for displaced persons dismantled to further push persons affected by violence back to their places of origin. Without effective peacebuilding measures and perpetrators of violence brought to justice IDP returns will not be sustainable.

Quite what the relationship between the current spate of ethnic violence and its impact on peoples' migration choices is not clear. However, deportees from Saudi Arabia have pointed to violence and insecurity as a motivating factor in the decision to leave Ethiopia via irregular means. That many Ethiopians opt to travel to Saudi Arabia overland through Yemen is indicative of levels of insecurity in their communities.

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## Senior representatives of Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (E-ZEMA), 17 September 2019

### Progress under Abiy; characterisation of political space

A lot in Ethiopia has been changing, it has been a transitional period. The ruling government have said they want to have a democratic country, and they have released political prisoners and invited previous designated groups back from other countries. This has been a very good leap in the right direction.

There are three groups that are unhappy about what's going on.

- People who held office previously – mainly TPLF. They're unhappy they lost power and want it back. They are engaged in activities that are de-stabilising in much of the country. They are funding activities and financing groups to destabilise the centre.
- People who see an opportunity where there's a vacuum in power or a lack of law-and-order capacity. They are trying to push their power boundary and control everything.
- People who expect their problems to be solved now. They don't have bad intentions; but they are not patient.

It is these three groups who are destabilising the country because they are unhappy. The groups all want a lot of power in these regional places, and it is stopping the government from working to their full capacity to make this transition successful.

Govt. capacity to control the second group is limited. There have been arrests. Journalists. Govt. is using the ATP, even though it's being reformed, to investigate people.

We are in a situation of hope but also little bit of frustration. We are trying to add up whatever reasons people have, build up on hope and minimise the frustrations and problems. We are still hopeful that the legal reforms, such as the CSO laws, reformation of the ATP and media laws, election boards, the justice system, the setup of the human rights commission, these are all good ingredients for the democratic process and for a democratic state with equal rights.

### Government control over security forces

The government's ability to control law and order across the country is limited. We are confident they have positive intentions to develop that capacity. The issue is with the regional police which are effectively the military. The federal government does not have direct control over these regional states and their militia. The regional states are based on ethno- linguistic groups and the security forces represent this. So, if you are not the same ethnicity as the majority of the region and effectively the police, then there may be some problems for you. We believe that more people with different ethnicities should be incorporated into the security forces.

The transition period we are currently in is making the government weak because there are a lot of grievances. In a stable situation and country, you can manage the ordinary police and manage regional police effectively, but the transition is making this difficult for the government and it causes some regional issues. The government in turn are putting in some states a state of emergency and people are unhappy and are complaining about their state being a military state. The government does not have effective control over the local regional states.

### Arrests of officials over corruption

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. We think there needs to be transitional justice or justice for past crimes, but we cannot go forward as a country by arresting and charging everyone from the previous government. We think some should be dealt with outside of the court system. However, where there are gross human rights abuses, or corruption, they should go via the courts.

There are some cases about corruption which are going through the court process, there are some cases where people are detained, some have to reimburse the money, and then some are released on bail. There is one case where they are refusing to cooperate with the government and the current government cannot access them. All of this shows justice and progress.

### Aims of E-ZEMA; priorities

Merging of 7 different parties. We sat down and decided to dissolve ourselves as separate parties and make a new political party, not as coalition but under one banner. 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.

We do not consider ourselves an ethnic party, we are a citizens group, anyone from Ethiopia can join but they have to have Ethiopian citizenship. Doesn't mean we don't acknowledge ethnic groups, or differences. We know this and respect these. But we want to move away from religious or ethnic identities. We want our politics to be for all. We want social justice. We want everyone – all Ethiopians – to have access to social services. We want an Ethiopian country where everyone respects individual cultures and languages and have a civil society with equal rights, education and engage with where markets need to grow.

We are currently operating in around 400 of the 537 election districts, we are encouraging and trying to reach out to other election districts.

### Number and profile of supporters

We cover 400 election districts and we are currently collecting the data on members who have signed and officially joined, they are the people who have financially aided us. We are sure that if an election was to happen in the near future we can bring the numbers and representatives from each district.

### Registration and government restriction on party function

We are using campaigning tools, so we can be ready for an election. We want to make sure our members, followers and supporters have paid their fees for at least 3 months.

Although ruling government for the last 80 years have believed in ethnic-based politics. It's not a new idea, but we want to make sure we get all ideas from all over the country. This is important. They need to be seen as a citizen.

We are in 400 election districts and we have a representative in every region, all 9 of them. In terms of penetrating these regions in the south we have covered 100% of them. When you go to Oromia we have only representatives in 60 in out 178 districts there are certain challenges. The government does not see it has a working efficient

government there.

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 [government] at a lower local level it has not been agreed and allowed.

We do not ask which language or ethnicity you are, we ask if you are Ethiopian and then you can join.

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.

#### Ability to function – leafleting, campaigning etc.

We have campaigned in the Amhara and Tigray regions over the last couple of weeks. On Sunday, we were in Mekele, before that we had an open meeting with the youth here in Addis.

We will continue to reach election areas. Wherever we are we are constantly engaging and continuing with our policies team. We have over 16 policy areas, we tell the people these policies. We have been able to go to territories and campaign. We are not going to stop campaigning, we have been challenged by government officials, local groups and new groups that are not registered (but have become mobilised have acted against us), but we will continue to campaign in the regions.

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.

#### Difference between members and supporters

Can distinguish between members and supporters. For members we give id cards. The process consists of the person being given a form where you need to include personal information such as, address, your photo, your employment and then you have to pay a membership fee. Outside of our memberships we have supporters, who are willing to vote for us and speak about us, these people may volunteer but not take out a membership. In each election district only members can select who will represents the district.

The process for electing a representative for each district is the following, only members who have been contributing to the party can be elected. They are usually picked from 23 members. This is different to the followers/supporters. Followers and supporters can volunteer, and they are not required to fill out a form.

#### Arrests of members/supporters

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. The government were arresting all members of the opposition, 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.

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.

The transition has not yet been fully achieved. We as political groups need to be more rational and patient. There are informal groups that are not under a banner and do not abide by the rule of law, these are a major issue to the government and to us as the political opposition.

#### Sense of scale of use of ATP

A splinter group from the OLF called 'Shene' which are based in the west region Wollega, were formally charged with the ATP law last week. A lot of people are being investigated and held under the ATP law. There is a journalist who is being held under the ATP law.

The people from NAMA political group based in the Amhara region, during the post assassination period have been arrested using this law. Since these arrests 2 people released.

#### Reason for govt. reverting to use of ATP

We can see the government's willingness to democratise the country, but the gap is from the government capacity to do so. The police and security forces do not wait to have evidence beyond a reasonable doubt, arrest people first and investigate them after.

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 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.

When Abiy was sworn in as president, one of the promises he made was to not arrest people unless they had proof or information beyond reasonable doubt. I do not think he has slipped back into the previous regime or broken his promise personally,

the arrests come from the police.

### Assessment of the new 'Ethiopian Election, Political Parties Registration and Election Ethics' law (24 August)?

We are happy with the new election law, we have a legal team who were involved in discussions with the electoral board. As a group we were not included in all aspects and not all of our provisions were included but this is to be expected, we are overall happy with the election law.

We believe that the new election law will broaden the multi-party system in the long run. The formation of the electoral law included discussions with all political parties, we were involved from the beginning, there were 3 major meetings to talk about our provisions, naturally with a lot of laws, not every political group was happy with the outcome.

### Media freedom

Some of the media is not entirely separate from the government, the media output is directed by the government. However, recently there has been some broader coverage over issues that were previously not covered by the media, for example climate change. Criticising the government for example the public service and exposing different gaps that the government need to work on, is still lagging.

There are people reporting on as much as they can but there are still cases where some journalists are being arrested on the basis of what they are reporting. For example, there was a journalist arrested from his office in the Oromia region, although later released. There are still journalists behind bars, some of the journalists are linked to what they reported during the assassination period. Journalists and social media activists are very careful on what they say against the government in the public domain.

### Role of social media

Social media is now playing a part, it is uncontrollable and everyone has an opinion. With the rise of social media has come with a certain level of hate speech.

Social media has created division more than bringing people together. The government in the past has tried to shut down social media; during exam periods and during the assassination when the government couldn't control the flow of information.

I have seen the draft of the new hate speech law, but it lacks effectiveness and capability. But this is only the draft.

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### Senior representative of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), 17 September 2019

#### Overview of the current political climate

The change happened because of the strong resistance from the youth. The previous ruling party could no longer govern so there had to be change.

When Abiy came into power over a year ago, there were promising reforms put in place, there were the releasing of more political prisoners, (although I was released before his assumption of power). There have been massive steps taken in legal reforms such as the electoral laws, civil society laws. There was an opening up of the political space. Since this opening up of the political space, Abiy has been talking

to the public and political opposition.

The country however, is still at a very critical cross road, there are a number of challenges. The main challenge comes from within the ruling party. There is no clear cross-party strategy for the reforms. The reforms are state-led reforms, but the ruling party has 4 parties in it. For us on the outside, we can see that certain parties in the ruling government are purposely dragging their feet on certain reforms. There is no consensus agreement.

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. We don't know which direction this is going to take it yet.

Political polarisation is another challenge both within the ruling party and within the opposition. There has been legal agreement between the government and the political opposition but no real agreement or understanding or code of conduct observed by all. The political opposition have not had [a] chance to gain momentum.

Competing nationalism - each political opposition group also represents an ethnicity. We still do not have a date for the election. There are competing nationalist ideas, some say we should first protect our regions and our ethnic groups.

There are people who have been displaced and still have not been able to go home.

The political problems and the future of this country are the current challenges to the regime. The rise in ethnic tension in the Oromo region, where more protests are taking place and armed groups are still at large in the bush. The Oromo are saying there should be [a] church of their own, others saying religion should be left to the followers and no interference.

Another challenge is the PM himself. He was a 'prophet' last year, these days it is not the case. He is a military person with little experience with civilian life. He has wanted to be centre of the change but could not negotiate with major stakeholders. The people he brought in for ministerial posts do not have the necessary experience.

Most of the government structures are not normally functioning and crimes are growing etc. He could not deal with the old guards who had blood and public money on their hands. Since TPLF took power in 1991, 30 billion dollars left the country so there is no control of corruption. The type and level of corruption is growing they take the small fish but not the big.

### Religious tension

Partly a new development, partly not. Religious tension is in the history for example when the TPLF brought in their own pope displacing an Amhara pope and the present divisions with Oromo Orthodox Christians. It has always been present but maybe more so now. The future of church is a massive contentious issue now. Religion has become politicised.

The serious challenge is unemployment. 5,000 (mostly Oromo youth) were killed [between] 2014-2018. This has encouraged people to want to be better and less violent new life with opportunities and employment.

### Security sector reforms

The reforms are not being sent down to the regional level. The government does not have the experience or capacity for security reforms and to ensure the reforms are followed. The whole system has changed and purged, but a new order has not been

put in place. We are at a critical crossroad.

### Corruption and corruption charges

Arrests/charges at middle level. For example, the high profile human right abusers, the superiors who gave orders have gone back to Tigray. The central government have issued an arrest warrant for the ex-security chief, but nothing has been done. One of the possible reasons why the security chief has not been arrested is because of the conflicts within the different areas. The regional government will not support the central government actions.

The amnesty report<sup>481</sup> [cited 'over 60 high level government officials' arrested on charges of torture and corruption by the end of 2018] refers to middle/lower level corruption. Level of accountability and acceptance of the government is shrinking. Even when it is publicly known who those with blood on their hands are, they were not brought to court.

### Characterisation of political space

Abiy is trying to form a better relationship with certain groups. These groups we believe are people that are strategically important to Abiy, for example in areas where Abiy has little support.

The OLF army have refused to disarm since returning, this is due to lack of trust in the government and their past history. I spoke with the leader of the OLF and explained there is only room for one army and there needs to be negotiation between the 2 armed groups to talk about integration into the army for combatants. Integration into the army and the police is important, as an economic opportunity (i.e. alternative livelihood). The fighters in the bush are the part of the OLF who have not laid down their arms.

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. There has been government response.

The people who are being held are accused of supporting the OLF but also include our members. If someone is against the government then they are linked to the OLF.

The people that Abiy is appointing are not representing the community. For example, there is recycling of cadres from place to place.

### Location of camps

The OLF, who are being held in military training camps or police stations, come from across Oromia. The one I mentioned is the biggest but there are other smaller ones across Oromia. This one, there are more than 300 ladies unable to communicate with their families. They cannot be visited, and they are not being taken to court. They get some training and indoctrination. Government officials are saying they are being held for training purposes.

### Reason for detention

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

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<sup>481</sup> Amnesty International, 'Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia's Transition', 26 April 2019, [url](#)

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.

### Source of information on training centres

People have been released, some being taken in. People have their own way of passing information in these days of technology. Some policemen also provide information, they are from the same ethnic group so there can be narrative there.

### OLF/OFC relationship

OFC and OLF have not merged but have created a tacit understanding not to be hostile with each other especially as we felt the youth could be divided. We want to train our younger generations not to be hostile to each other. We issued a statement together to show the direction, that our future is co-operation. We could have moved further and officially created an alliance but the problem is that firstly, they are not officially registered as a political party. Secondly, members of the ruling party panicked when we issued that statement as they were worried about the combined support so it was sensible not to over-do it.

The government know the difference between the OLF and OFC. The government is more agreeable to us in comparison to the OLF, but we are not getting involved. The OLF is symbolic to the Oromo resistance. The OLF knows that without this tacit agreement it cannot exist alone, especially because more political parties are against them. We are the only group that is openly friendly to the OLF. The other political groups believe the OLF want a separate state. From a statistical point of view, both our young supporter[s] matched each other in the past, they are ready to be mobilised if the need arises, we both are aware of the costs of hostility between us. The government also knows this, they do not want us to combine forces and become an alliance.

If the election was to happen tomorrow, the government would lose if the OLF and OFC were to join together, we would win around 90% of the votes. What the government is doing in the Oromo region or trying to do, is back firing on them, for example there was a flag ceremony at the presidential palace. An elderly person was supposed to hand the Ethiopian flag to a member of the younger generation to show the history and future being passed down to the younger generation. There was a reading of a poem where the language suggested something negative about the Oromo region. People from across Oromia took this as an insult to the whole nation and language, there were calls for Abiy's resignation.

Young activist[s] with some social media accounts posted online and said that he has let the Oromia population down.

The prime minister was trying to create unity with the flag, but it completely back fired by causing offence to the Oromos. Some argue that Abiy's support base is declining. In the upcoming election, he will not win in Oromia as things stand now and the Tirgrayans are moving away from him. They have contacted us and [the] two groups are really competing.

We are registered and OLF is not yet. The government is trying to register splinter groups of the OLF. 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.

## Election law

I was part of the group involved in the consultation for the electoral law. Most political opposition groups had a chance to see and work on the election law with the electoral board. After this, when the bill came out there are some serious provisions that we had not seen. Some of the major issues which even now still do not understand are the following; the need to leave your job, most people cannot afford to leave their jobs for 3 months, it would be psychologically damaging given the economic implications here. Secondly, many people with experience to run are already employed by the government or within the ruling party so this would not be helpful for the country. Teachers do not support the government but do not have the opportunity to take annual leave, so how can they campaign? The final issue is, which I believe is morally wrong, is the government does not include ministers, parliamentarians, members of council in their definition of government employees so the law does not apply to them. There are 65 political parties who do not accept this, so already the law is controversial.

They increased the signatures needed for the formation of a new political party, for the national parties it went from 1,500 to 10,000 members. The OFC does not have a problem with membership numbers but with resource, we have over a million supporters but do not have the resources to go around the country to obtain the signatures. We calculated that it would cost 600,000/500,000 [Ethiopian Birr ] [approximately £12,000 – £14,000] from our own pocket to obtain the signatures.

Most of the government and government political oppositions are on the government pay roll. We are not worried about our support base but the resources.

The government have big resources. They do not have the same problems as us, they claim they have 7-8 million members but can obtain the resources, but it is really causing an issue for us because these provisions were brought in at the last minute, we do not know who or how these were brought in at the last minute.

## State's ongoing interest in those who participated in the Oromo protests 2014/15/16?

All the prisoners from the previous protests are out but new people have been arrested, it happens in my home town. This time they don't take them to court. Young people. The arrests are a preventive detention, it is not because people have committed the crime, but it is in case they commit the crime in the future.

They might have been involved, they might have been older prisoners but these are fresh detentions after massive releases. Generally, on ethnicity but also from the Oromo group and political. What the government want is that they [are] arresting them as they are Oromos.

## Release

People who show signs of joining the government tend to be treated better. If they do not, you are punished so eventually you do not support the opposition. These people are like farmers, teachers, local people.

## Armed OLF/OLA

The government forces do not directly attack people in the bush and the people in the bush do not target the forces, because they know they are equally matched. There is a tacit understanding. Forces are being used for political advantages. Even government soldiers are avoiding going into the bush, going as far as if the fighters in the bush need supplies the government will let them out because of their

capability.

There has been some exchange of resources, they buy bullets and guns from soldiers. There is trade between the fighters and government forces, but the local population with no weaponry are really feeling the struggle, in the western part of the country are really facing the real issues.

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## **Legal expert and active critic, 18 September 2019**

### **Describe progress under Abiy**

In general terms there has been an opening of the democratic process and some respect to individual freedoms.

Abiy is not committed enough in maintaining law and order. Not often using legal methods to open up individual freedoms and rights.

There are displacements of people and casualties between some ethnic groups across Ethiopia. Conflicts are arising but at the same time Abiy has opened the political space into a democratic one. For example, the former proscribed groups were given an amnesty. He's not just adhering to the legal situation.

### **Views on legal reform**

I am assisting on this as are other legal professions. The Civil Society proclamation has already been amended. Media law is on the way to being finalised. ATP also on the way to being revised. Electoral law is also already revised. The media laws which are protecting individual rights are not yet finalised. They are on the way to be revised, but this is on a voluntary basis and most of them are not yet submitted.

But the security forces are using the older laws. For example, if you look at people who are detained currently, they are being charged under the old ATP law.

### **Push back or resistance?**

There is push back at times, the committee meet once or twice in a month. It has an impact on the quality of the work and the expediency of submitting the work, our work is voluntary. It has an impact.

### **ATP law use and arrests**

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 (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.

### **Reason for re-use of 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 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. The draft Hate Speech law is also very vague and can incriminate many people.

#### ATP being used in same way as pre-Abiy?

You can look at this, and the way they are using the draft hate speech act – they are too broad and too vague. The laws are before the council of ministers now. If you look at the intention to introduce these laws, they are inclined to use the former way of the previous regime and there is a genuine lack commitment to reform, at least in this area (the security sector) this is just my assessment.

#### Assessment of the new 'Ethiopian Election, Political Parties Registration and Election Ethics' law (24 August 2019)

People demanded a reform of the electoral system. It is currently the 'first past the post' (FPTP) system. There is no change however. It doesn't bring such major reform on the electoral systems. It was mostly about the re-establishment of the Electoral Board. We have looked previously at reforming to proportional representation however, we still maintain FPTP.

#### Impact of the assassinations on reform

I was there and was due to have an appointment with the general who died that very day. A friend called and told us about the incident. There were lots of police forces who went to Bahir Dar and at the same time the commander-in-chief was assassinated.

There were tensions between Amhara and Tigray regions and tensions between Amhara and Oromia. The president was somewhat aggressive in reforming the politics and economy of the region. Some security forces were assigned to train the security forces of the Amhara region, but they engaged in reforming the police, political and economic sectors.

There are lots of people who were assigned to regional government/district level in Amhara who were arrested. They were the General's (Brigadier General Assaminew Tsigie), vices and deputies. This has a big impact and caused more frustrations for the people living in that area. Now the level of confidence the Amhara people have on the prime minister and his government is declining.

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.

#### Characterisation of political space and ability to function

Abiy liberalised and opened the political space. This has simply opened up but not institutionalised the reforms. Opposition forces came back to Ethiopia after the call to. There have been lots of releases, including civil society but Abiy is not doing it in accordance with the law. We have 130 + political parties but if you go to the electoral board and check it there are not more than 30 political parties registered. The 130 are functioning but they don't have the licence, they need registration, and some are working without. The Govt. and the Election Board are not so bothered about

progressing the applications for licences – or making sure they have a licence.

Some of the zones are under emergency military command post. Four zones in Oromia regions are under the military command post, it is a sort of state of emergency de facto.

There is the ONLF. They were proscribed as terrorist. Some of the OLF are functioning here in Addis, but others are fighting still in parts of Ethiopia. But the current President/PM doesn't sort them out. It creates a situation where people don't know what's going on.

If you look at the work of social media, it is the Amhara activists and Oromo activists who are setting the agenda. The government respond to this, if it becomes a public issue, the government responds.

Sidama is an example of this. It is actually the Oromo activists who made this an agenda via social media. But the arrests that follow are then of the Sidama. But it's not those who did this from the Oromia region or Oromo activists.

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 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

In relation to my colleague and journalist who was arrested. He was a close friend of one of the people assassinated. He was arrested and released solely with ID card. Mass arrests in Addis working for newspaper and TV and members of political parties. These that are involved in Amhara politics or the National Movement of Amhara, which is a legally registered political party.

### Ongoing interest in those released?

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.

### Process of release

Mass release. If it is an amnesty or pardon, it was done in accordance with the law.

Even a few weeks ago they released 500-600 prisoners or so and those who were in under ATP law. But now they are starting to arrest people again – and most are Amhara and Oromo.

But now you go to Oromia region and you get hundreds, or thousands arrested. Unlike what they are doing in Oromia region they are targeting Amharas who are involved in politics and who are influential.

### Detentions in Oromia and allegations of 'rehab centre'

I don't have details on this. However, rehabilitation centre in ETH generally means putting the arrested persons in military-style camps to be trained and indoctrinated – in constitutional issues and/ or party issues. They are there for a few weeks for training. There are no psychologists, social workers and other professionals etc.

After mass arrests they release them giving them papers to sign to not be involved in political opposition parties or not to challenge the constitutional order. As for these mass arrests, it is questionable as to whether it works. If you do this to criminals, you re-educate them to join society. But not sure it works here if they don't sign? They don't release them.

### Other parts of the country?

In the Amhara region the social structure is individualistic, there are no mass movements. People are arrested selectively. Mass arresting people wouldn't work, and they don't need it. If they are arrested in mass and put the people in training camps in Amhara, they would not just accept it. Following the assassination, you are seeing an increase in the arrests in the Amhara region.

But 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.

It is more stable in the Somali region. There are some arrests, but that is mostly by the regional Government.

### Assumption that Oromo = OLF?

Most political parties are not registered, and a lot of members aren't registered. If the government believes that someone has a certain affiliation with OLF or anyone working with OLF they will arrest you, or they may want to justify mass arrest [of] a wing of [the OLF] called 'Shene'. It is becoming just in the thousands.

The region of Oromia is complicated. The OLF is a group founded over 40 years ago. When Abiy came to power they were invited to come back to Ethiopia. People believed that there was going to be a transition into democracy in Ethiopia. But the reforms were not in place. All of exiled groups came back and tried to reintegrate but there was no negotiation and compromise with the leaders. The major issue in this region was that there were many rebel groups fighting the previous regime, not just the one and because they have all come back expecting to have power in their regions they resort to the [violent] methods. Jalmero is the new leader of the OLF rebel group.

### Motivation of govt to arrest following de-proscription?

OLF were rebel groups and came back, 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.

### Detention – treatment and mistreatment in the context of Abiy and his commitment to

### the end of use of torture.

Abiy promised to change the previous modus operandi but the government lacks commitment in really implementing the rules. One of Abiy's main failures is maintaining law and order across the whole of Ethiopia. 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. There are lots of groups are working against the government and this might be one of the reasons for the mass arrests, it could also be related to the Tigray and Amhara regions. People from the Amhara region believe the government are working with people from the Tigray region who want to remain in power. For example, a high-level official, namely Getachew Assefa who was the Head of The National Intelligence and Security Service who committed human right abuses is in the Tigray region and the government are not arresting him.

### Ethnic conflict

There are tensions in the border areas of regions.

There are lots of issues behind this. It's about rights to land. If you look at Addis – the Oromo believe it belongs to them; the Amhara say it belongs to them. Then there are other areas like this that creates tension. But it's the land issue that creates the tension.

In the constitution, it says that land belongs to the people – ethnic groups – but not individual people. This then creates tension. If you take Addis, it says it is found within the territory of Oromia – so the Oromo are claiming that it belongs to them.

If you also look at other districts – for example the Dera district which is say, 150km from here [Addis] – though more than three-fourths of the people are ethnic Amhara, the district is included in the Oromia region. And these are claimed by the Amhara region.

### Response either state or federal – to OLF soldiers who invaded Amhara

There were 2 major incidents in 2 different district[s], number of casualties was reported by state media. State government intervened. All the OLF were ambushed or killed.

In the other district not as such publicised but the federal government and the Oromo and Amhara regional governments know all these issues and try to solve the case, but it was somewhat suppressed and not made public. And tensions in the adjacent area are not de-escalating too.

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### Political section, British Embassy Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019

#### Current political landscape

Things have improved in a lot of ways, the political space has been opened, political prisoners have come back from exile, media freedom, political freedom. But things are becoming more fragile in certain regions in Ethiopia. [On a] Recent trip to [Somali Regional State] SRS where people were saying this is the most stable state, which is interesting to hear because it was once the most unstable state.

In terms of foreign policy, Abiy wants to bring everyone together (for example Eritrea), but the challenge is institutionalising these changes. A good example of this is the Eritrean border. No longer a shoot to kill policy at the border, people crossing

but officially it is not open. And there are a large number of issues that need to be resolved.

There are large numbers of IDPs in Ethiopia. A peak of around 3 million was hit earlier in the year, although this has started to decline. Some are due to climate change but the majority are as a result of localised conflicts.

In the Somali region, there are still clashes between groups even though there is this high-level peace deal.

In Gambella Region near the South Sudan border tensions between Nuer and Anuak communities are ongoing. At the moment the town is really divided based on ethnicity. Two aid workers were killed the other day in a car. Rumour was that one was a Nuer or there was a Nuer in the car and the attackers were Anuak.

### Non-voluntary returns of IDPs

We have raised concerns with the Ethiopian Government about the return of IDPs to their home areas. They would insist that returns are voluntary not forced but have a narrow definition of 'forced' return as basically meaning 'at the barrel of a gun'.

The government needed the IDP problem solved because of the international attention so we believe Abiy told the Ministry of Peace to handle it, but with no real direction as to how to handle the situation.

### How Govt. dealing with situation in Oromia

There is a peace and reconciliation commission at the federal level which the German government are putting a lot of money into it, but nothing has yet to happen with it. There are a number of local initiatives on the ground and attempts to bring together government leaders, opposition leaders and traditional community leaders. It remains to be seen if these will bear fruit.

### Govt. control of Security Forces, esp. in regions

Govt. has control of Federal forces. But under Ethiopian constitution primary responsibility for internal security lies with the regions. Regional Security forces vary hugely in size, training and how they see their role – whether truly to police or more as forces to defend against other armed actors, including from other regions.

### Liyu police (Somali Regional State)

Lots of changes there. Trying to re-educate the police in human rights etc.

Actually, a really encouraging picture on this at present. The government now are trying to prosecute those who committed human rights abuses in the past and re-educate the forces in Somali region. Trying to recruit people in. This has been a success in some ways but needs more work. There are still police who need to be prosecuted for their past actions, but the government are saying they can only go one step at a time.

### Change coming from Abiy (i.e. top down) or local/regional

In Somali Regional State Abiy deposed and arrested the previous president Abdi Iley, who is accused of serious human rights abuses, last August [2018]. Abiy then appointed Mustafa Omer (a Somali political activist who used to work for the UN). Sources tell us it really depends on who is the person in charge as to how the security and police forces behave.

Looking to re-integrate ONLF fighters, but this is being held up. Being held up at

central Govt.

Concern by all sources spoken to that the longer this goes on, the risk is that the ONLF get disillusioned and go back into the bush. When Mustafa came in, he brought in a new system, and people have told me from within the region that it matters who is installed at the right time. It all comes down to the regional government. There is potential that the ONLF could go back into the bush, my colleagues have made this point over the last couple of days that the situation is good but it is really fragile, and unless we keep up with the reforms with removing the road blocks we could slip back to how things were in the previous regime.

### Support for the ONLF?

The ONLF are setting up political offices across the Somali state, but in other regional states they have a gloomier opinion. ONLF have support among the diaspora. Not sure about level of support on the ground. They have some, but it's not really clear.

Capacity to function wise: they have asked for money, the regional government have given some cars and 2 offices, although the ONLF complained it wasn't enough. The ONLF have a good relationship with the government and it is going well, they have a reconciliation process which is so far going well.

Sticking point to ONLF becoming a political party is citizenship. Many hold other nationalities, and new law says you must be Ethiopian. But they are talking to the government about this. I think the leaders of the political opposition groups are willing to give up their foreign passports so that they can register but not quite yet they will fight this provision for slightly longer.

### Ability to function as a political party

The ONLF is better placed than the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front), the OLF are more factionalised and the ONLF are acting more like a single group. In general, the ONLF can function and have come back to run the party and participate within the political space. From what I know about the ONLF have had little to no issues with returning and functioning as a group. ONLF have just opened an office in Addis for the first time in years.

Previous fighters who come from the regional places and couldn't go abroad pose a potential challenge because they are coming back into the arena with no qualifications.

The security situation in SRS is very still much ranked at red and amber, there are always challenges and if the ONLF DDR process is not managed right by the government, it could go the wrong way but at the moment it has been good.

### Govt. (mis)treatment of returning ONLF fighters

I'm not aware of any. The process has been quite good, unlike for other returning groups where support and provision has been slow to materialise.

### Eritrea/Ethiopia relations

There was the peace deal last year which was a massive thing to happen. At the moment it looks like the war is over, there is a relationship building between the Eritrean and Ethiopians. However, in reality, the peace has not yet been institutionalised. The border has been intermittently opened since the peace deal was announced, it was partially closed last year and completely closed in April this year. There are rumours that suggest that the trade Ethiopia was bringing into Eritrea

was causing an issue for the Eritrean government. A positive though is the law shoot to kill is no longer happening and there are people are crossing. Heard that people from Asmara were being stopped and checked, but those in the border region were being allowed to cross. But not sure about that – there are lots of rumours on these issues.

ERI shut the border and didn't tell ETH. However, the two sides are still talking. In Addis and Asmara, there is talk about cooperation and development between the countries, but we are not sure what that looks like. On the Ethiopian side, they are really interested in having access to the port in Eritrea since at the moment they are entirely dependent on Djibouti for maritime trade access.

Isaias has stopped blaming Ethiopia for Eritrea's problems, but we believe retains concerns about the TPLF who were in the lead at the time of the war.

### People crossing

There has been an outpouring of people from Eritrea, from the UN figures it is an astonishing number from their own estimates. It is hard to estimate for us but it was in the hundreds of thousands over a couple of weeks and months. Another rumour is that's why the Eritreans closed the border but regardless there are still crossings.

Ethiopians do sometimes go across the border into Eritrea, but this is more a case of families' communities reunification for trade or just to visit families. It is more Eritreans coming here.

### Rumours of 'concentration camps' in Oromia

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, split from the Ethiopian church, push for nationalism and power and it all feels quite aggressive and something we need to watch

### Seeing this in any other regions

Gambella has been tense for some time, don't have a huge amount of detail on this as its largely remote areas beyond Gambella town but security reports segregation and out bursts of violence. Amhara is always something to watch especially with the assassinations that took place. There has been a general rise in ethnic nationalist sentiment in many of the regions, especially Oromia, Amhara and Tigray. Also, agitations for new states in SNNPR (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region).

The elections (due in May 2020) are a big unknown factor and could lead to rising tensions in various parts of the country.

### Any news on arrests/detentions and/or the rising use of ATP

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.

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## Hassan Moalin, ONLF Foreign Secretary and Head of Addis Office on Federal Issues, 18 September 2019

### How has organisation evolved since de-proscribed?

We were marginalized for a long time not for religion but for our nationality. Historically, there has been fighting in Ogaden since the British left in the 1950s.

We were part of the transitional government until TPLF changed its mandate in 1990s. The change in the 90's meant we were forced to take up arms. We have been fighting for 24 years.

In 2012 the late Prime Minister could have facilitated a peace agreement between the ONLF and his ruling government, but in 2012 no one was ready to reach an understanding and negotiate, the TPLF killed our chief negotiator. So we then refused to negotiate in Ogaden, and we must have a third party. Zenawi asked Kenyans to do so. We tried to negotiate from there (I was one of the negotiating team). But we couldn't reach an agreement.

When Abiy came to power in 2018, he opened a political space for us all. We believed it was a miracle when he delists us as terrorists in parliament and said they were struggling for their right and the government was committing a crime against humanity.

We think that if Ogaden is settled, it will settle the region. You look at the situation in Somalia, it is a lot down to this.

All this change has happened and since 2018 we have sat down, talked and agreed on a ceasefire. The government sent a negotiation team, which included the ex-foreign minister in Addis, to where we were based in Asmara. We negotiated with the previous regime for 7 years and got nowhere. But there is real change. Together we came up with a time-table to achieve a sustainable deal. There were 5 things that were discussed during this meeting they were;

1. to cease hostilities on both sides
2. pursue ONLF's political objectives through peaceful means
3. address the root cause of the conflict in Ogaden
4. uphold or implement the provisions of the constitution
5. set up a joint committee at central government level and regional level to discuss issues.

In regard to number 4, the constitution is good. But it is not applied properly. My family has been arrested because of me. That is not right.

We committed and signed the deal on 21 October 2018 [\[JA1\]](#), on the first December [2018] we were welcomed back to Addis. There was a gathering where people attended from all society. As political leaders, this was the first time in over 20 years we connected with people, it was a mixed bag of emotions. There was also a big celebration in Jijiga.

Our ex-combatants was 4,000, and except those wounded and disabled we transferred the rest to the Somali Regional administration.

Spoilers were spreading rumours saying we were looking to take over the region by force and saying because the OLF is fighting against the government. ONLF is committed to peace and stabilizing the SRS and the region as a whole. We are

helping the Govt. in different areas – the election board, laws – we don't want to go back to the dark days

The change under Abiy is good, but there are some groups that exist who are trying to undo the work, they are criticising the government

### Govt. control over security forces, especially at regional level

This is a very complex question. In the past the military was under control from a single party, the orders they received came from a one-party and now Abiy must change this, the reform is a struggle. Some of the police who committed human rights abuses under the previous regime have managed to escape justice which is shown in the media, but it is important to remember not every police and security forces committed these abuses.

In the previous regime, the security forces used to have more power but after the change took place they do not have that much involvement in the running and political arena in the Somali region.

For example, the Liyu police used to have a really bad reputation – they were committing atrocities. Now they are being reformed. They have had training.

In general, you can't say all the Liyu police were all criminals.

So there are many sectors in the security apparatus – the military, Liyu police, normal police, the local militia – but they are much less active than they used to be.

But when we are talking about ETH more generally, there are ethnic tensions, esp. between Tigrayans, Amharas, and Oromos. You know about the killings of the Amhara regional official and general in Addis Ababa.

There is a power struggle within the EPRDF – the reforms, which the military is the part has started but there is still a long way to go until we see change.

### Practical issues – ability to register, campaign etc. Is this the same in Addis as per regions?

The government is in the middle of a transitional period. There have been new jobs created where new people have been hired as well as replacing some people who worked under the previous regime. In most cases, human beings resist change or find it difficult to accept change easily, even when it is good. Abiy's team is doing well at the central level, Mustafa is doing well at the regional level, but as you go down the levels, accepting political opposition becomes more difficult. The issue is, it was a one ruling party system for a long time, it takes time to change their minds and accept the change.

Two things help us, (1) we are not against the government and two we are not contending the central government in Addis, (2) our sole focus is how our people get their rights.

We have submitted our registration form to the electoral board, which under the new election law would allow us to become a legal political party. We fulfilled all the requirements which will allow us to function all over the country, but we have not yet received the certificate.

We have opened an office here in Addis. We have an office in Jijiga and many parts in the Somali region.

The SDP [Somali Democratic Party] at the lower regional level still create some difficulties for us to function, but it is not like the rest of Ethiopia. We have a congress

here in Addis. When we meet with the other parties there are over 100 parties, we hear the different problems they face and in comparison to other political groups we are doing fine. We are supporting the reforms and democratising process.

### Impact of June 2019 assassinations on ONLF

The assassination in June 2019 effected the whole of Ethiopia, even for us in the 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. The ONLF released a statement against the assassinations because they killed innocent people, we all came together as an executive committee and released a press release regarding this issue.

### Ceasefire and integration of ex-fighters

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.

The ONLF flew to Northern Ireland where we were trained in peace process and reintegrating into society, we learnt that the peace process takes a lot longer than we planned. In the Somali region the violence was bad but since then we have become one of the most stable regions.

But the Government do not perhaps fully understand the wider steps in the peace roadmap. They think come back and register as a party and that's fine. But we need to think about orphans, women who have been raped, previous prisoners, as well as practical things like economics, and the effect of the environment and famine and how we are going to tackle these to provide livelihoods. Two million livestock died in 2016 and this led to IDPs' and we face a lot of issues in our region.

Now people are asking what the peace dividend of their actions has been. They want to know what we have gained something tangible. But our ex-combatants know only how to fight. They were well trained in Eritrea and other places. But we are worried they will be attracted by some groups. We are worried about this. We need to make sure they don't resort back to fighting. The joint committee were appointed 3 months ago and met few times and discussed many issues

We have met with the Prime Minister and the Somali regional president but there has been some stalling underneath that. They are busy; they have a lot to deal with. But there hasn't been as much progress as we would like.

### Estimated support for ONLF

About more than 70% of people in the Somali region would support ONLF. We have some support from our region. Our slogan is self-reliance.

### Youth Movement

The OYSU - Ogaden Youth and Student Union - a student union that is linked to our party, they met last month and elected a new leader. They have branches in our 54 chapters/offices around the world.

We also have OWA – Ogaden Women's Association - which is a key to a lot of our work.

### Differentiation between 'member' and 'supporter'

Yes. We have many supporters, but not all of those are members. 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.

### Treatment of ONLF

There have been some arrests of the ONLF (post Abiy) but we are not considering this a big deal. The woreda who are in control at the district level arrested some of our members; there was a beating of a woman in Kabridahar and then further arrests of 4 people. But you cannot compare it to the previous government.

There is change at the central government but at the regional government, it is more difficult for them to accept the change which is happening in Ethiopia. It is not easy to be part of transitional change. It is not an easy process. Other people have more issues, we have only a very small number. I think still there are cases of arrests, and we are not 100% safe due to the resistance on the ground.

A few people who were arrested were released after 2 weeks in Warder, and some others in the shinile zone are still wanted by the court, they were accused for carrying ONLF's flag and trying to open [an] office.

We are trying to forgive and find a peaceful solution for the Somali people. We are also trying not to create a problem. This also gives us a chance to reintegrate. We don't want a position. We don't want money. We want Somali people's rights.

We want the key human right abusers from the previous regime arrested. I believe to move on from the past and develop as a country we have to forgive each other. This will all feed into our future as a democratic country.

Under the previous regime, we were only struggling for the Somali region, now we are a national party and struggling peacefully for the whole Ethiopian people.

We are expecting more fractionating of parties and probably some extra attention from the government on political opposition during the election period.

### Reasons for arrests

It was a misunderstanding. As I said, the people at the local level mistakenly think we are coming to take their positions. But we are on good terms with them. It is not easy to be part of this big change, for any side. But we are doing good. These issues are very small in number. We complained to the people concerned. There are still some incidents like this. You can't say it's 100% safe for us, but it's better.

### Release, and any conditions attached

Yes, most were released. But there are also some legal processes – some are wanted by the courts and these are ongoing cases.

### Returnees and diaspora

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.

### Ethnic tension

The Somali people are pastoral[ist]s, and a lot of our issues are to do with weather and the land, they are not always political. It was only over the last 3 years when the TPLF engaged in fighting and creating division between the Oromo and the Somali borders. The border between Somali and Oromo is over 1,000km from north to south

and there have been areas of intensive fighting between local armed groups.

We believe the TPLF were behind the extent of the violence. Since returning we have tried to open dialogues and meetings to talk about the actions by both sides. One meeting was in Adama and one held in the Somali region in Jigjiga. Things seem to be going in the right direction but there is still a long way to go.

There is also a conflict between Somalis and Afar which needs to be addressed on the same way through dialogue.

Finally, we hope the UK government will give time for Somali people from Ogaden to be safe 100% to return home.

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## **One of the NaMA leaders, 18 September 2019**

### **Progress under Abiy**

The past 18 months have been very challenging and unique time for Ethiopia. Since Abiy has come to power, there has been an opening up of the political space. National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) was established immediately after Abiy came to power. We used the opening up and the free space to recruit hundreds of thousands of members, to tell the Amhara people about our political program and the ultimate goals of our political movement.

So far, we have opened 160 offices, held over 200 town hall meetings. It was very good opening up at the beginning of Abiy's administration. Moreover, inviting the exiled opposition was also a brilliant idea, so that they can start a peaceful political engagement.

There has been interest by the administration in reforming the repressive laws such as ATP, CSO, and reform of the electoral board, justice system and courts. It was indeed an exciting opportunity for Ethiopia to move forward to become a democratic country. However, all these attempts to reform the old system, regions and country has faced a lot of challenges:

1. Some of the exiled opposition who came back armed started attacking civilians, in different parts of the country such as in Wollo (around Bati and Kemsie) and Shewa (Minjar, Ataye, Senbetie and Majetie) of the Amhara region. Groups that are affiliated with armed elements of OLF were openly inviting violence. This disrupted the calm in Ethiopia. Abiy's administration failed to protect the attacks by armed groups in Wollo and Shewa (Amhara region), the civilian attacks around Addis Ababa (Burayu Massacre) and civilians took it into their own hands to protect themselves.
2. Abiy was pressurised by different interest groups. Oromo nationalists pushed him hard for the Oromo agenda. The Ethiopian people was expecting him so that he could push the national agenda. He has faced a lot of challenges. He was swinging between his Oromo base and the pan-Ethiopian mass.
3. After the June 22 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. Over 500 Amharas accused of being a member and sympathizer of NaMA have been arrested. 6,000 Oromos are reportedly detained in a military camp called Senkelie in Oromia region by Abiy's party, ODP. It is not only those affiliated with politics, but journalists, such as

Amhara Satellite Radio and Television (ASRAT) journalist, journalists from *'Ethiopia'* newspapers are imprisoned. Political activists who are pushing the government to open the political space are also in prison. The hope we built over the past 18 months following Abiy's acceptance and inaugural speech gradually transpired in to the air.

### Registration of organisation

It took us 6 months. Once the new chair, Birtukan Midekassa came for the electoral board we complained, and we got the certificate, the reform on the electoral board has brought some brilliant people in, which we hope that they can lead a credible election (given there is commitment by the ruling party).

### Ability to function - Meetings, campaigning, advertising

Every meeting was peaceful in Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz (at least once a week in Amhara.) In Addis it is different – we got permission from the Mellinim hall but then suddenly the owners said no because they were threatened by the Mayor's office. We appealed to the Addis mayor's office to get the consent letter, but they were not willing. Mayor Takele Uma (CC [central committee] member of ODP [Oromo Democratic Party] ) and his senior cabinet are unwilling to let NaMA hold a discussion with Addis Ababa residents, as they are afraid of the show of NaMA's strong support in the city. They wanted to suppress the Amhara voice in Addis. They say they have security concerns, but we did not believe that there were a real and evident security concern. We even tried to hold a meeting in small halls but were not allowed.

Oromia is more difficult, some of our offices were attacked, our members and sympathizers were frequently harassed. We also faced similar arrests and harassments in Benishangul Gumuz Region.

### Impact of assassinations - 'crackdown on 500 Amharas' and their profile

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.

### Extent to which being directed by Abiy and govt and extent to which they have control of security forces

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 any evidence presented before the court, showing the involvement of the arrested Amharas in the June 22 killings and the attempted 'coup' to court, it was an immeasurable amount of time before they, the Federal first instance court, ruled that there was no evidence showing a criminal involvement and order all detainees should be released on bail with 1,500 Birr. The [attorney general] AG appealed to the high court and the high court rejected the first

instance court decisions. We took the case to the Federal Supreme Court [which] agreed with the 1st instance court. However, since mid-August [2019], the order of the court was not respected and our party leaders, members and Amharas are still under unlawful government detention. 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.

### Re-use of ATP

We have seen a reversal of all the promises Abiy has made. Abiy said he was not going to arrest then look for evidence any more. But people have been arrested and they try to produce 'evidences' afterwards. Some of the 'evidence' presented against arrested people were 'possession of NaMA manifesto, NaMA stickers, membership fee receipts, etc...' which are all legally allowed docs.

### Treatment in detention

I have to be honest, there is not any physical harassment so far. However, they are detained in cold houses in underground rooms. We complained, and one of the police heads of the prison promised to change the rooms and they did. But interrogations were long, like 84 hours. So, they couldn't get proper rest. The wife of General Asaminew was arrested and detained whilst three months pregnant (due to lengthy interrogations, she was sick and suffered abortion and related psychological crisis). Some people were a little sick and couldn't get proper medical treatment. Compared to previous arrests this seems better, as there are no torture and reported physical abuses.

### Releases – any ongoing interest at federal or regional level?

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.

### Oromo and OLF

The OLF has split since its formation for the last 40 years. There are at least four groups led by:

Dawud Ibsa – peaceful engagement who are based in Addis,

Jal Mero - the group currently fighting government forces in Wollega. This group is probably conducting the attacks and ambushes that have happened in different parts of Oromia. However, it is very difficult to attribute all the conflicts to that group.

We believe that some extreme elements within OPDO could also conspire with these armed groups. It is difficult to know what's going on with the different OLF groups, and the attacks on civilians in different parts of Oromia and Amhara regions.

There are also other OLF groups led by Gelessa Dilbo and Gen. Kemal Gelchu.

### Fuelling the ethnic conflict?

I don't see the impact of these armed groups attacks on the Oromo and Tigray relations. But in Oromo and Amhara provinces they are leading to suspicions and nervousness. Post 1991 genocides and mass killings of Amharas by OLF/TPLF in areas of Oromia including in Arba Gugu, Bedeno, Asebot Monastery, Wuter, Enkuftu and Harrar and the recent Oromo armed group attacks in Wollo and Shawa made the Amharas to be cautious as the news spread. People were nervous, and tension

rose because the genocidal memories are still fresh and many people then feared the past could reoccur.

### Govt federal or regional intervention?

Suspicion that the military and Oromia special police could have collaborated with OLF armed wing to attack groups in Amhara such as attacks of civilians in Shewa. The response from the federal government was varied and sluggish. The Federal government forces such as the military and police were not always interested in protecting the Amharas. Even the farmers in Shewa complained about the lack of involvement of the federal government.

### Legal reform - ATP

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 civilians. The drafts have been done and put before parliament. We have been consulted on the reform of ATP, however, we don't think that these changes will bring the real change our people needed - justice. So far, the new president of the Supreme Court does not seem to be powerful to bring the necessary reforms such as the independence of the judiciary. We do not think that there are strong institutions in which this reformed law can be executed. We are still optimistic that in spite of all the challenges, Ethiopia will move to democracy, however, a lot of work needs to be done.

### NaMA differentiation between members and supporters

Members have to be formally registered and pay monthly contributions and have the right to elect and be elected. Supporters are not formally registered or have no ID cards but they give us ideas and participate in events, donate money, help us organise town hall meetings, for example on a volunteer basis.

### Following June arrests – did the govt differentiate between members and supporters?

In some of the arrests, the security forces had made distinctions. 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.

### Redress?

We are trying to make people aware that they are being targeted due to bad politics and their ethnic background, simply for being Amhara. Abiy is not working in a way that he said he would. We had a team of brilliant lawyers who are representing Amhara prisoners of conscience at the courts. They challenged 'evidences' by the police and government Attorneys. However, the problem is that the final decision is a political one and not a legal one. The farmers in different parts of Oromia were detained for at least 2 weeks, brought to court, the court investigated and ruled that they should be released with a 5,000 Birr bail. This is a lot of money. It is to discourage them economically, they cannot afford that, if they are arrested again.

This is an example of economic intimidation from participating in politics.

### Length of detention

It depends on the specific situation. 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 are detained over 3 months. It depends on the area.

### Extent to which this is influencing party support

What we have witnessed over the past two months is that people feel that Abiy has tricked the Amhara people. At the start, Amhara people thought that Abiy was truly promoting Ethiopian nationalism. But after all these crack downs, we see a momentum building up. Originally the Amhara people were reluctant but now people are openly joining our movement because of the pressure from the narrow ethno-nationalists.

The NaMA profile is mixed, we have farmers, professors, students, and youths actively supporting our movement. The numbers fluctuate and it is hard to give an estimate. The last report I had from the organisation was half a million nationally. In Addis, 80% had a university degree. It is a phenomenal event. I would say that there is [not] any opposition party that has such a diverse membership profile and large number of members as NaMA had.

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## Ambo University lecturers, 19 September 2019

### Progress made under Abiy and impact of reforms on Oromia

The reform at the beginning seemed to be very good. There were a lot of elements that were being changed, which was good for Ethiopia.

1. 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.
2. We saw different organisations and individuals coming back home from exile. Key opposition political parties such as; OLF, Sidama Liberation Front, ONLF, Gambella Liberation Front, Afar Liberation Front and their leaders came back to the country. Similarly, prominent human rights activists, artists and scholars also allowed to return back to their country.
3. 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.
4. Journalists and Medias also relatively given freedom. Formerly banned Media like OMN [Oromia Media Network], ESAT [Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio] , ONN [Oromia News Network] and different magazines are allowed to broadcast from within the country.
5. Solving the situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which solves not only the face-to-face conflict but also the proxy war between each other in other countries of the Horn. This is a big benefit for the Horn of Africa.

As part of the reformation process there is a Ministry of Peace, headed by Abiy

Ahmed, which opens the dialogue for peaceful and human rights-based decisions to be made to create peace. This is all positive for Ethiopia and the reformation process.

But the reality on the ground for Oromia and Oromos is different, still central objectives of the social revolution are yet not answered. For instance, the question of the Oromo on Finfinne [Addis Ababa] boundary determination like any other city in the world, now it is borderless city which took the surrounding territory as it wanted and the question of ownership since it located in Oromia it should be ruled under Oromia (later named Addis Ababa). Making Afan Oromo the working official language of the federal government, given the population number speaks Afan Oromo as first and second language in the country.

The questions of other nations also need attention and should be solved as per the constitution, [for] example the Sidama question to regional statehood, that of Wolayita, Guraghe etc, to be zone from woreda (district), to be recognized as nation like Qimant, Agew, Wollo Oromo in Amhara regional state and to be secured from killing and torture by the regional security forces.

When we come to the situation on the ground for Oromia, the central objectives of the social revolution were not answered.

1. The Finfinne's ownership and its rule under Oromia regional state due to its location in the region as well as delimitation of its boundary never answered, even no attempts to do so. But no one can deny the fact that the issue of Finfinne is one among the major causes of the 2014 Oromo social revolution and it was the immediate cause for the 2014 social revolution 'The Master Plan', the plan to widen the boundary of Finfinne by 150km radius.
2. The security of the people is also under question. It's not been answered clearly. For instance, attacks on Benishangul Gumuz, on Qimant, Agew and Wollo Oromo in region three (Amhara region) where the ethnic minorities under influence and the people claim mostly as the attacks has been conducted by formal regional security forces and sometimes by informal armed forces. In addition, there are problems in Dire Dhawa, between Afar and Somali. Here there are 2 weaknesses of the federal government, one unable to defend the people/delay to do so and 2, unable/weak to control the illegal transfer of military weapons. Most of the time the government react [rather] than [are] proactive to solve political, economic[] and social problems.
3. The Oromo have also been asking to make Afaan Oromo, a language spoken by majority of the population both within Oromia and other regions like Somali, Gambella, Benishangul Gumuz, Amhara, southern nation etc and in the two cities (Addis Ababa and Dire Dhawa) as a second language the working language of the federal government but still nothing has been said.
4. People in general and the families of those killed and highly tortured demand, the perpetrator and actors of human rights abusers – the officials, the security force, police, the intelligence and any participant in such unlawful activities, directly or indirectly, to be brought to justice. But still they have never been brought to justice. 90% of those have never faced justice.
5. The same is true for the issue of corruption. Corruption creates a wider gap between rich and poor. The rich are ok. They can survive. But the poor cannot. The central point is the corrupt officials never brought to courts or their property never nationalised. Not only corruption, but also unemployment and the informal

increment of market price from time to time are what challenge the people and the economy.

6. Government either unable or not interested to control illegal transfer of military weapons which currently destabilize some regions like for instance Amhara, Gambella and in long run may destabilize the whole country given the divergent political, economic and social interests in the country. So, it is better for government to control the illegal trade of military weapons.

The people who are loyal to the government will never face a prison sentence. Even when murder is committed. People can commit torture or crimes against humanity and they will be able to go free. Previously, the government did not give the people a choice and being a member of a political party was illegal, but we do not have this system now. Still, if you are loyal to the government you can be appointed or will be exonerated of their crimes.

The people who were in power previously are still very much there, the very same people who were against the social revolution but when it became reality they are a part of it. What should have happened was more people should have faced justice. If they do not put people before a justice system, the government will lose all the reformation progress they have made. The reformation for the public was always about whether there was rule of law or not. So, if the law is for everyone, including the military and prime minister and the public, let everyone face justice.

But the government have not been proactive in this area, therefore it can be assumed by some that they are against the reformation. There is a lack of commitment from the government.

There has been a high number [level] of corruption. Human rights abusers are still in power, for example at all levels. The public demand they be brought to justice.

The other critical question is employment and economics. The market price increasing from time to time due to corruption. No one can survive day to day. So, on the ground there are still a number of problems for the government and this transition. There are also political prisoners now like past, the number is higher in Oromia than in other regions.

### Freedom of political groups to operate in Oromia

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.

It is known that some of the members of the political opposition are in prison for their political beliefs, this is for example claimed by the leaders of the political opposition.

The preparation for the election is not so good. It's lagging behind. We need democratic nationalist, proportional representation in the federal government, but I am very pessimistic.

The government makes a certain group a terrorist by naming them such, this enables the federal and regional government to arrest members. The leading opposition parties in Oromia – the OLF or OLF 'Shene' – they claim the Govt. imprison their 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. They also jail Qeerroos on this basis and media or activists. There are thousands of people put in jail for political reasons

Social media is now playing a part in the opposition's ability to function, thousands have been put in detention centres for their political opinion; in Wollega region in Oromia.

As a region we were hopeful for Oromia but right now we as a group of academics are pessimistic about our prime minister. The prime minister has failed to solve the problems with his brothers who are the people fighting for the Oromia cause.

### That is happening now, in Oromia?

Yes. It is happening in Sankale. It is a detention centre. There are many detention centres.

### Profile of those arrested (aside from Qeerroo) and reasons for arrest

The government proscribed the OLF as a terrorist organisation but has since de-proscribed them. 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.

The Oromia region is factional, there is no sense of unity. In this town – Ambo – it is ok. But not far from here, there is support for Shene – over in Guji zone. There is a disintegration of the Oromo. We are not united, we are missing this within the region. We have a region that believes in nationalism and a lot of us want to solve the Oromia nationality question, but when there are loads of agendas on nationalism, how? We manage the Oromo nationalism. But the PM is trying to stop that.

The prime minister claims to be learning how to incorporate the Oromia questions into the central government, but he is not serving our interests. The nationalist or unity of sharing language, the church, the entire justice system is still missing.

Our prime minister is trying to reconcile the central government with the Oromia region. Previously the Oromo have felt neglected by the central government, but by being Oromo himself he hopes to draw more support. It is still true that you have the other side who are the factions in the bush. There is the whole political space missing. The PM claims to be leaning towards the Oromo. But if we try to remove him, we have no-one. We are missing hope, but we have no choice but to support him.

In Oromia, we have the Gadaa system. It controls the whole justice system here. But in Tigray, it is more Western. This is a competing system.

Reconciliation with ERI was good. We lost a lot of youth in the war with ERI. The concern is how the PM could solve such a big question (ERI) [if he] cannot solve the situation with his [Oromo] brothers.

### Targeting of Shene?

If a person were to criticise the government then that person would be 'Shene' or if you were a person fighting in the bush, the government or the authorities will suspect you and you'll be detained. Shene is a high committee of the OLF. They take that as a derogative term, but it is a nice thing for the Oromo. Shene means 5, but the government and authorities see it as an insult.

The process of committing a crime, going to court with an investigation, where throughout you have contact with families and access to a lawyer is missing. People are detained in military camps where there is no visitation. At the moment, we do not know what the authorities are teaching the detainees. The government are

saying the authorities are teaching the prisoners to be a good citizen, but no one is in contact with the people inside, so it is unclear what is happening.

Anyone who is pro 'Shene' will obviously be detained because the government believe the group is acting against the reformation, but the Shene and OLF do not want to take Oromia from Ethiopia. The group (and us) want the language of the federal government to be Afan Oromo, we want more numbers incorporated into the military and the security forces. The protests that changed the country started here in Ambo, we believe that Ambo or Oromia should be the base for the democratic country.

### What are people doing to attract the attention

In 1960's, when the OLF was formed, they wanted to create a separate Oromo country. That was then. They don't think like this.

You can contact the high officials in Addis – like I have – and they have no plans to take Oromia away from Ethiopia. They just want Oromo language to be a working language; and that there should be proportionate representation in the army, police etc.; then there are the issues with Addis, which should also be the capital of Oromia region. Wondering why the Oromo farmers are being evicted when Addis is expanding.

### Detention

There are still 5,000 Qeerroos, scholars, professors, medical teachers detained. There is a detention centre less than 5km from here. In the Amhara region they have detention centres.

There is no due process of law still. You can look at the intelligence head of the OLF. He has been detained 10 months and still not being taken before the court. There are many others like this.

### How know about Sankalle if no-one can visit?

Not allowed for people to visit. But different individuals from media; activists; they always claim that. Those who are released from the detention centres give testimonies and information on this and what is happening in these detention centres.

Yesterday, I met 2 guys who had been released from prison. They said there was no food to eat, beating, psychological pressure.

Always there is a conspiracy, even between Oromo political parties. And there is ego between the 2. There is a big competition between OLF and ODP. OLF has a willingness to consolidate Oromia state power. ODP has a big ambition to hold on to power – this is a dream.

Here there are also problems among OFC, OLF, ODP – they have no idea between them how to decide this. And there is ego.

The OLF is really the Oromia flag. The Oromo is imposed on the region. There is still no agreement on the flag. Even on this, there is disagreement between the parties.

ODP plans to eliminate the OLF and the OLA – the political wing and the military wing. Oromo people are between two very hot things.

Saw poster down the road welcoming OLF/OLA back. Can you openly support OLF here?

Previously, they planned to eliminate the OLF. But they can't.

OLF has almost the total support of Oromo.

The OLF flag is what is considered the Oromia flag. All of the political parties are fighting over the OLF flag, the authorities can sometimes be seen wearing the flag. This is because a lot of Oromos suffered in the past from that flag, the flag was used by the OLF against the government so now everyone who sees the flag sees it as their freedom. The party itself is trying to make it the regional flag. The problem is not with the flag, the people love that flag.

The OLF flag is now associated with the Oromo people and their struggle and why they were conflicted with the previous government, nothing else. The public demand unification, they demand the historical issues to be answered. The division and tension around the OLF flag being used is for the political groups' own political advantages, the OLF are separated that is why the factions try to promote propaganda against each other. It is the main political desire - to stay in power.

There is tension because within ODP, the criminals and human rights violators are still free. They should be brought before court. For last 27 years, incl. our own PM, the security agent here in Oromia. What the OLF wants is to bring everyone justice. For example, at the end of the revolution the government supported and tried to incorporate civil society, but the biggest human right violator has averted justice and is living in Tigray freely (I heard that the former NISS head is now regional Tigrayan security head).

The TPLF wanted to get rid of the OLF, but the OLF are in the heart of Oromia and its people. Now the TPLF have gone, the OLF is still here. The government which is part Oromo have the complete support of the Oromos. OLF has almost the total support of Oromo.

Ambo key in 2014/15/16 protests. Are the police – local or Federal – still interested in those involved in the protests?

In the central part of the country, we will be hopeful and see what happens with the reforms. But if there are problems, they will happen again. But the PM is saying don't rush for the change.

There are still people close to the centre of the government who believe Abiy and in this reformation period. If it continues like this, we will be happy. 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.

No one has since been arrested in relation to the protests, the only people being arrested are those linked to Shene.

Ambo is considered the centre of the Oromia struggle. The UK protected the leaders of our political groups, and Ambo and us continue to be a part of the reformation process. The 2014 protests were special, it was massive the questions about our political freedoms were raised by Oromia people, and the questions still arise in the future. What we want works for us, but does it work for Ethiopia? It does not.

Before 2018, the Oromo people were extracted by the government with their land confiscated by different people and the government. Now in 2019, Oromo heroes can be celebrated where before whoever celebrated them would be persecuted against for being anti peace.

Re-framed to whether heard of people being arrested now because of what

happened then?

No. Not of interest now.

### Question of Oromia

One of the main problems is the question of Oromos. Question one is the nationality question, which is the right to govern, using the language and have an identity. This is not addressed by the current government. Oromos are still marginalised.

Oromo-phobia is rising. A human rights activist did a TV interview (Eskender Nega) and mentioned that Oromos are now free, but hate is rising.

Securitisation is happening in the current government. The Govt. attacked the Shene and established 4 security zones. This is in order to secure the region.

The ETH army recently said that they are following the ICC group and this is why they are securitising different parts of the region.

Our people [Oromo] are asking, democracy, freedom and peace and financial stability.

There is always suspicion of or a conspiracy theory against the Oromo. The political parties are fighting for themselves. There is big competition between OLF and the ODP. The OLF have the willingness to support the Oromia questions and the ODP are focused on power. The problem is that they are wider than just their singular issues.

Oromia needs unification within our region and have asked for this, but we Oromos have not given this.

### The culture of ODP and economic issues

Even when there is an Oromo in the centre of the federal government there has been no compensation for past crimes.

The TPLF all have big business, the Amhara is in the government, how is the government going to increase our economic situation and capability when there are already different ethnic groups in charge of various segments. There is also super high inflation.

Concern that the political culture in the OPDO is to promote the criminal.

The government has no commitment, the so-called nationality of the country is very problematic for different groups. There are over 80 nationalities. The ministry of education wants to adopt Amharic as its national language, so we ask the question does our prime minister want to impose Amharic nationality on us.

OPDO plans to eliminate the OLF and the OLA – the political wing and the military wing. Oromo people are between two very hot things. We want it noted that we love Abiy.

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### OLF officers, 19 September 2019

#### Overview of the current political climate

The last 18 months are the first stages of the reform process, we have seen a lot of change. The release of political prisoners, the return of political groups in exile back home, and the new political laws that open up the political landscape, this was all the first phase was good.

Things haven't gone well in the last 6-7 months in the so-called promised reform process. In Oromia where we are based, [it] is getting complicated as the government backslide over its promises, what was promised to us is not what is happening. Almost 20,000 OLF members were arrested and put into Sankale and Tolay military camps and other concentration camps where they are forced to stay one to 4 months without any court charge.

We have opened around 40 offices, about 30 out of the 40 have been closed down. In Oromia region 9 out of 21 zonal administrations are under the command post. The most frustrating part of this is it was not properly reinstated. It was declared by Abiy, he has the power to reinstate a [state of emergency] SOE that lasts only 15 days, but it has been 8 months. A huge amount of human rights abuse has taken place, people have been killed, reports that property has been vandalised, the youth have been arrested and our members and zonal reps have been arrested. Many houses have been burnt, mother and her daughter have raped together, farmers cultivated fields were destroyed. When we have observed what was promised in the first phase and what has happened now is in contrast.

The major actors for the change to happen were opposition parties; especially the 'Qeerroo' movement organized under OLF. Now after 18 months major questions raised by Oromo in Oromia remain unanswered such as making Afan Oromo federal working language, the right for self-rule, respect for rule of law, about Addis Ababa concerning right over the capital city etc, rather against this out of the 5 top executives of the capital city, 2 were from ODP and the rest EPRDF member parties each represent 1, but now 2 were from Amhara representative party ADP this change is against the initial move.

Education plan – the mandate to prepare primary education curriculum is of regional state government but against the constitution and federal structure. The ministry of education prepared a new curriculum that impose[s] teaching Amharic starting from grade 1 in all regional states. This happens by ignoring one of the major questions of Oromo Protest i.e. making Afan Oromo the second federal working language along with Amharic. The purpose of new Education curriculum undermines and disregards the sacrifices paid by Oromo to restore its identity and develop their social and cultural values and belief system in opposite to the Ethiopian uniformists. An unbiased self-realization is a necessary condition for lasting stability and progress.

There is space in the media but federalists who have been undermined as other voices are louder, including government owned medias campaigned against federalists' view[s]. Almost all regional states including Oromia are presented by vice president. Which is tactical weakening of regional states power. OLF believes Abiy and E-Zema want to undermine the current federal structure and move towards a unionist view. Despite the huge hope for democracy at the beginning, now we have almost lost that hope.

### Free & fair elections

We do not expect a free and fair election under this current system and administration. Two things worry us, first the security problem. The government is actively causing the regional security problems too harsh so as to extend the election period in this pretext and second the government are pushing their own agenda against the constitution and protest demands to try undermine us in the election.

There is no viable alternative to an election right now. We are getting ready for the election in our full capacity even though we know it may not be free.

## Security sector

In south and west Oromia there are no economic activities, farmers cannot even plough their land. They are not allowed to do so by hostile government forces. In general, there is adverse effect on economic activity of the people.

We are really worried about the security and justice sector reforms. The reforms have not taken place; rather what has been done is the reshufflings of notorious authorities instead of making them accountable. The security and justice sectors are controlled by the government partisan. One person from the previous government was replaced by another loyal person to the new government and then put into high positions. Areas within the justice sector have been reformed alike; hence the judicial procedure has remained the same.

The security and justice sector structures remained intact doing business as usual. None of the justice sector are reformed. Hence the structure, the procedure, the attitude remained the same. It is failing as a protector of people.

## Military camp and reasons for detention

The problem arose at a police station, the police simply arrested OLF members with no questioning or charge, the police say it is not them that arrest them but the intelligence sector or the military arrest them. During their detention in the police station, they have no[t] enough and proper access to food, water and medical service. The members will be transferred to military camps kept there for a long period. The prisoners are left in the hands of the military, again they do not have access to food, water and medical care in the military camps. Police harass then mentally and physically.

There are 5 pregnant women in the camp now. The prisoners are forced to live in cramped conditions, with only a single piece of bread and a cup of tea per day. When they go for food they are harassed, sometimes they have to do press ups. When the prisoners try to rebel, the guards use tear gas. Last week there was a clash between prisoners and police in Sankele and more that 150 were injured including women.

## Pictures from inside Sankele and how obtained

The pictures were taken by the police inside Sankele. We have very narrow access. They were OLF affiliated police.

## Sankele – profile of those detained

The detainees in Sankele are OLF supporters, members, committee members, central committee members and even OLF affiliated non-members.

## Women and children - change in profile of previous detentions?

Why we do not know. Mainly it is the young queerroo who are in the camp.

These prisoners come from across all of Oromo region, some are from extreme south, east and west, it is difficult for family members to visit the prisoner in jail since very far from their homes, this is done deliberately by the government. The reason behind the arrests is because I think due to the governments fear of the OLF's mass base deep-rooted support and hence fear of losing the election.

## Purpose of this detention?

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.

### Release/conditions of release

The government release one batch of prisoners from the camp who are then nfi 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 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.

We haven't got an exact idea 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 [the] notorious central prison.

### OLF membership/composition

Six of our members have been arrested in Addis over the past week, the government did not give us any notice of their arrests and have given no indication to their whereabouts to date.

We believe the arrests are happening because of the frustration due to warmly welcome we have received by about 6 million supporters in Addis when we returned from exile. As a group we have a large social base, especially in Oromia region with a lot of support.

The military wing of the OLF are still in the bush, we consider this a para militia. The government fight them and randomly arrest OLF members engaged in peaceful struggle they cannot/do not differentiate between the paramilitary in the bush and the OLF in the political space.

### 'Shane' [Shene] group

There is no organisation called Shane [also Shene], it 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'. It was disseminated to the public through the media to get some sort of attention.

'Shane' is a term derived from the Gadaa system literarily meaning 5 but equivalent to executive committee or politburo. It is the top management in OLF organizational structure which makes all important decisions next to general assembly.

### Differentiation between members and supporters

OLF recruit members from the community. To be a member you have to undergo training, especially on our political manifesto. After they know our political manifesto, we send them for duties such as opening offices and attracting supporters at grass roots. We give official ID cards for members. A lot of our previous members who have been operating underground for a long time are now active and operating.

## Qeerroos

Qeerroos were the beginners of the movement and change in the pretext to protest master plan which the OLF established in 2011, the aim of this was to engage people in the mass protests against the TPLF. Since 2011 the OLF have worked well in establishing, training and giving orders for their activities. They were very much part of the OLF movement as a youth wing.

Now they are more established with their own manifesto and digital media such as website, radio station, and media. They organise themselves as a grass root organisation.

They receive orders from OLF and they have been reporting to the OLF. This is how they came into existence. The true qeerroos are part of the OLF organized under the name of 'Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromo'. They are a huge movement which is still continuing the struggle in Oromia. When we started the protests in 2015, we had different questions in general for example on political self-rule, freedom, equality, economy issues, and many others. Their questions have been left unanswered, so the Qeerroos are still active. In retaliation, during the revolution the ruling party, [the] ODP, tried to organise their own Qeerroos, by delivering some benefits to them but the Qeerroos organized by ruling party ODP do not exist anymore. However, the only intact youth organisation now is "qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo" organized under the direction of the OLF.

## Registration of party

OLF has finalised and submitted all the required documents. We are now waiting for the response from NEB (national election board). We are worried about the security problem that is seen in Ethiopia, the crisis is caused by the government because they want to push the election further away in pretext of security problem, they are going to try to do this through different government institutions such as the electoral board, court, its government structure, etc, as business [as] usual.

There is no other alternative than to participate in this election, we are building our capacities and restructuring ourselves, so we can be ready for the election, but we do not expect it will be a fair, free and reliable election.

There is no economic activity within the country, farmers cannot farm in certain areas of their own regions, the military force will not allow them to do so. This is even so worse than the previous government practices, hence there is an adverse effect on the economic activity of the people.

## Ability to function

Our organisation operates in Addis and surrounding area but not in wider Oromia, even in this current so-called democratic space our movements are restricted to the city. Part of the reason why we operate in Addis is because there is media here and all the meetings are held here. The movement in Oromia is limited. We are not legally registered yet, we have a letter of recognition to confirm we can organize, train and teach our members, but when we take this outside of Addis the local government do not accept what the federal government have issued. Which means we are limited to Addis and the surrounding towns.

## Harassment etc in Addis

Me and my friend have been arrested and detained for a day, we couldn't participate in the New year day event. In addition, our members are randomly picked [up] from

everywhere and put into prison.

### State's ongoing interest in those who participated in the Oromo protests 2014/15/16.

The protests that happened in 2016 held some significance when ODP recognized that they can't reverse the protest by force some of them involved and supported these protests and even promised to take the leadership to democratic transition. Since coming to power the government and Abiy have tried to disband the 'Qeerroos' and the major organisations behind the protests which is similar to how the TPLF handled protests.

Now they don't want to hear about the protests. Their interest has now derailed the intended change. The govt became anti protests, anti-multinational federalism and anti-constitution. They do not want to hear the grievances that have been heard for years. Most of those people who were detained had been in prison before Abiy came to power, it's the same people it's those Qeerroos who were protesting previously. More or less the Qeerroos behind the protests and the majority of Oromo in Oromia understand the changes and reforms are not real, it is simply a cosmetic of the government.

After one and a half years there are still major questions that were raised by protesters in Oromia, especially about ownership of capital city and its boundary; about human rights, equality, democracy, making Afan Oromo federal working language, self-rule, the economy and education. All the questions have gone unanswered. The most important question raised during the protests were undermined and disregarded in general.

The unionist idea is to have the whole of Ethiopia under one system. E-Zema is working closely with the Abiy government, they are trying to dismantle the current federal structure and work towards the unionist agenda that the government want.

### OLF aims

The reforms that are taken place are not our primary agenda, 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 reformists agenda was to get attention from the media and the international community, and it has worked to some extent that does not live any longer.

The current reform is like wax and gold. What is seen on the ground and what laid hidden is too different. We gave the government enough time for the transition to succeed but now we are not expecting for more change, the reforms are very far from what were demanded and not in agreement with the wish and ultimate goals of our party.

### Use of ATP

We have heard in parliament and in the media that the law was repealed but 20 of our members were being charged last week under the anti-terror law. We are confused because we are not a terrorist group, but they are still using the anti-terror law against us in the court.

### Reason for use

The court is using it, but we don't know if that is legally applicable.

The ATP law has no reason to exist, we do not know why or how they are using it against us legally, but they use it against us.

## Profile of the OLF people in camps

We do not have the exact number, it is unknown, more than 20,000 people have been arrested in different military camps over the last eight months. 8 people have been arrested and put into the military camps this week, why? The main target of the government is the vibrant youth who voices their grievance

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## Head of an international NGO, 20 September 2019

### Overview/background

2 refugee camps in Somali region; 2 in Gambella; one camp in Shire in Tigray (ERT refugees).

We are the NGO representative for the CRRF [Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework] steering committee, lead facilitator of the RINGO (Refugee I-NGO), active on the advocacy front (illegal until May 2019)

Also tracking the reasons why ERI coming into Shire. 80% interviewed cited that they came into ETH for family reunification, but unclear on location of reunification (refugee camps? Addis? Outside Ethiopia?). Talking to EU+ Migration Donor group.

New arrivals and what the policies should be.

### Govt support?

Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) manage the refugee response. It's really hard to find out what is going on as ARRA doesn't share figures. Current Level 3 – top registration (iris scan) – have dropped from 900,000 to 600,000. It's hard to know the process in terms of numbers and reasons people are here. So, don't see a lot of Govt. support for this process. Even the data on number of refugees is opaque.

For example, the person came and says they want family reunification, but it's that they say 'I want to go to my second cousin in Sweden'. So, they may not always be aware of the processes and preconditions for family reunification in different countries. Family members not all aware of the situation. They will send remittances here, but they (family members in Europe and the refugees in Ethiopia) don't know how long the process takes. They think they're leaving at any point, and don't enrol their kids in school. Then the remittances run out. Studies show that high degree of frustration have a correlation with secondary movement.

### Main driver is family reunification: other reasons?

Just done some research on this. Can give you more. But main reasons are economic prospects.

### ETH returnees?

The numbers are much less, but we have just seen a request for assistance from ETHs (c.800 households) in Djibouti (DJI). Most are Oromo. So it's tough to know whether they see it about Abiy; or whether it is to do with law changes in DJI. The camps are becoming more and more run down. A little bit of voluntary repatriation.

It's challenging as ARRA want to know that they are ETH. But it's hard, because some might have been born in the camps.

### Political space: either for refugees or more generally

Surface it looks welcoming. The borders opening in ERT etc. People feel more

positive that there is a peace deal. CRRF is encouraging in ETH and seeking to integrate refugees. In reality, there is no change from before. No movement on legislation to enable refugees a life.

You see a lot of rushed movements at the top; there has been a lot of investment (e.g. World Bank) but not a lot of coordination on practical things – e.g. the right to work. Refugees spoken to in Addis have asked for work permit and they said get your education docs etc which an ERT refugee cannot do.

This makes refugees more frustrated. Then this causes tension e.g. in Gambella with the South Sudanese. There's a perception that refugees will be offered jobs when the local population need them. When the Revised Refugee proclamation was ratified– twitter people saying you're giving jobs to them.

Reduction in police forces in Shere, increase in crime. The Tigray govt asked for the federal govt not to remove all our police forces.

Hear the perception that it's Afwerki in charge; not Abiy.

### IDPs

The situation is going to be worse for them because of the ethnic tensions. Biggest problem is that the Govt. doesn't recognise properly that they are IDPs.

The IDP response plan had three phases:

1. Those who can go back now.
2. Those who need a few things fixing and they can go back in, say, 4 months.
3. Those who never go back and can integrate in areas of displacement

But this didn't happen, and they started involuntary returns, they brought the buses. They don't force – because the Govt. doesn't use physical force, in all areas but they tell them they will have all they need when they go back. We have told them that if you tell them this and don't deliver, it is on you.

The narrative then (in July) became 'there are no IDPs'. Additional information provided by the source after the meeting was that the week of 7<sup>th</sup> October, the new statement is that 100,000 IDPs remain.

We know from our experience in the field that some have gone home and pursued their life. But many have gone back only for the day etc. and return at night. Then others have gone back and are too afraid to stay, so have moved again.

We actually don't know how many IDPs there are - difficult to register as IDPs do not want to self-identify, and registration may not put them in danger.

Conflict at the borders. For the election to happen you need a census to define population, but to do that will create a lot of ethnic tension, especially as population data has defined some administrative boundaries based on ethnicity.

**[The following information was added by the source after the interview:** With the recent announcement of PM winning the Nobel Peace Prize, in spite of the fact that the borders to Eritrea are closed again, that there is no substantial real change in CSO law, the PM is reinvigorating the anti-terrorism law against journalists, there is no change in refugees' ability to access rights afforded to Ethiopians, and that people remain displaced and in fear of returning home, he is now untouchable. I believe that this makes the situation more dangerous for people who challenge the current narrative and makes it more difficult for the humanitarian community to

advocate for the rights of the displaced.]]

### CSO law and impact

This is one where it looks quite nice and shiny but real advocacy difficult. For example, you go to the Ministry of Peace and tell them X, they say go and tell the local zone to fix it; then you go to the local zone and they say go tell the Ministry of Peace. Or you get shutdown.

25 of us NGOs wrote to the Ministry of Peace, ARRA, President of Gambella re: the killing of two aid workers in Gambella and we were told this was embarrassing not acceptable/illegal.

We wanted public condemnation for the crimes, perpetrators brought to justice and more security and protection for aid workers. A lot of blaming Gambella regional forces etc. However, none of us were detained for advocating and that might have happened a year ago. But it isn't leading to anything effective, which is a little discouraging. The government paints a picture that shows they are in control but if they were to admit that these humanitarian workers were murdered and that the preparators weren't brought to justice it would look like they are not in control, hence why they have not done anything.

### Ethnic tension

Most displacement is caused by ethnic tension and/or drought. Up until 2015 that's when things started bubbling up at ethnic tension. And then it became an issue. More fear at the borders for example fear of Al Shabab. You see a lot of people who can express themselves and are passionate about why they are discontented, mainly about employment but this then gets ethnicised, which feeds into the ethnic tension.

SNNPR [Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region] person cannot live in Oromia for example. You see a lot of ethnic tension, where it makes you live I'm not sure I think you can live in other places.

### Returns to ERI

Very little reverse migration back to ERI.

ETH/ERI Tigrinya speaking – differentiating between them it's quite hard.

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## Life and Peace Institute, 20 September 2019

### Overview of the current political climate

There is a sense of optimism with the general situation. There is a big difference from last year to this year.

The historical context needs to be understood, if you do not contextualise the situation in 2018, it would be difficult to appreciate the change because we started with a low political space. The reforms started within the security sector and have now spread to the civil society. The previous government made it hard for themselves to govern, there was no room for dissent, this is where the story started. The EPRDF had managed to dominate all parts of life: political, social, religious. By end of 2014 /15 it was a victim of its success, control everywhere, so when things went wrong it was to blame. The opposition (as illegal) went underground and that is not easy to control. 2005-2015 height of EPRDF power. After they feel the threat to their power; that is the reason for being authoritarian. The system needed to be

ventilated and it imploded. In that sense it is so difficult not to appreciate the changes since April 2018.

State of Emergency [SOE] became so much, every day insecurity.

Before 2018 the government conquered everything, in the elections the results were clearly fixed, they over performed by saying they got 100% in the election, this was when the situation imploded, and things had to change.

Abiy has a populist stance and is now filling the gap. Everyone wanted to be rescued, Abiy was seen as a messiah to the population. Abiy promised to change the system and when he said this, it electrified the nation to make the change happen. Abiy in his acceptance speech said it (his self-understanding) that he would bring political salvation when the country needed it most. He was very optimistic.

The change driven by social and protest movement but also internal protests within EPRDF. He drove a lot domestically, regionally, internationally. It is a very optimistic movement, in the short time since his inauguration regionally Abiy has succeeded. It's surreal to see the de-proscribed groups in Addis. He brought a new spin on EPRDF, radical left politics. His speech is filled with religious rhetoric and about making ETH great again. All this has awakened many people.

He offered the Oromo move from side to centre. The nationalism resonates with the Amhara also there is an Oromo and Amhara 'bromance' for the first time ever. Oromo politics has an anti-Amhara centre which is nurtured by the Tigrinyans (TPLF). The new process of change brought about a significant change in political alliance for the first time, it has not been fun to be Amharic for the last 27 years either. The epicentre of protests pre Abiy were Oromo and Amhara. He has catered for both somehow. He also connected with the 'urbanite' Ethiopian, those that either didn't care about the tribalism or were mixed heritage.

All of us believe that this is a second chance for Ethiopia, nobody thought the OLF and ONLF could be in town, and the TPLF being pushed out of power, it was a political commotion. We didn't have the time to reflect or navigate. It appeared all is well, with no real questions about what this would mean.

We all underestimated the challenges, there was a lot of political naivety. How can all of political issues be resolved just by Abiy? Everyone is disappointed by how slow it has been to fix the issues, but not everyone who came back came back with the right intentions.

OLF in western Oromia are one of the biggest problems for Abiy's government. The government had to use military force (air raids etc) to enforce rule of law. People thought this is a state chaos and were therefore disenchanted with the change that brought it. Having a platform for liberal expressions also creates more problems. Some problems are brought on by Abiy himself.

People found themselves in deadly confrontation. Ethiopia has reputation of having the most IDPs in the world by conflict. The conflicts can escalate quickly. Youth groups have become vigilantes, people expected a lot and when they did not get it they have become mobilised.

The reforms are complex and will take time. The youth groups that are occupying the regional areas, are self-governing, they are forcing the population to pay for water and occupying illegally, this has caused panic, this happened in Harar. OLF holding hostage. We thought the change would be easier than it is, the people who loved Abiy have stopped.

### Need for structural reform within EPRDF and accountability

I would say the opposite. Abiy dismantled the authoritarian structures too quickly. The first sector was the security sector, which is one of the most complicated sectors to break down and reform. Abiy knows whoever is in charge of the intelligence is in the ruling party so he tried to restructure this sector to get rid of the TPLF, but Abiy didn't replace it with a new reform which caused issues at the regional level. Abiy came to power and removed all TPLF, but they were the ones experienced in security. The threat on his life highlighted this.

Ideologically he doesn't connect with EPRDF, he is about the party (ODP). He operates more 'presidentially'. The party structure is something Abiy puts a lot of weight into, he didn't want to use the authoritarian structures to gain legitimacy, he said he wanted to reform the security and step away from the previous regime. He would not be responsible, Abiy wanted dialogue and to soften the hard terrain, this did not pay off. Abiy was a populist he was promising everything to everyone. If the Oromo cause comes up, he cannot fight with them because it would marginalise that group but by not acting against the Oromo militants, he marginalises other groups. This happens across all the regions. Abiy is trying to buy time until he can fix the system.

This has caused people to be disenchanted with his rule, and now people think this is Oromo domination, we've had Amhara ruling, we've had Tigrayan ruling, now it is Oromo time, they believe that they use be in power because they have the largest population.

The incident here in Bahir Dah where OLF were implicated. What he did was establish numerous commissions etc and none were effective. I would like to see accountability for Bahir Dah. Abiy has lost support in Amhara, they do not trust him, they believe Abiy wants Oromo politics to dominate. There is a deep resentment.

The ones that called the shots were OPD and Abiy himself is Oromo. Now he has potentially lost support of the Amhara. They feel duped. The Oromos are claiming everything, resources, power everything, could have seen this deep resentment from the Amhara about Abiy. Deep fragmentation. Abiy himself is ambivalent, inconsistent about the election. I don't think he thought that the time was right but now there is the strengthening of TPLF again and the fractioning between Amhara and Oromo, so Abiy has given this election to buy time. There was a statement that of course election will be on time. Ethiopia has become more marginalised and fractioned.

### Extent to which the government has control over the security forces

They have control but it in an issue of capacity especially security.

The intelligence and military in the past 90% was controlled by TPLF, Abiy purged them so quickly when he came to power, the change should have been more gradual and smarter. There has been no process put in place. This was a security that could not see members of the Army marching to the PM, they didn't see it coming they weren't prepared. We needed the structure. The alleged coup would never have happened under previous government.

There has been a rise Amhara nationalism and militant groups is concerning. We haven't seen the security doing anything because of lack of intel - not looking at the issues properly, regional areas have become more assertive.

### Extent to which the changes instigated by Abiy have translated down to action(s) by the security forces and arrests of political opponents

Arrests 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 but he wasn't very responsive. We could have avoided what happened in Awasa. 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. He has sometimes been soft when he needed to be tough and then tough when he should have been soft, it is a case of wrong type tough at the wrong time.

Political forces are actively subverting the change. TPLF, obviously, but also OLF thought Abiy was diminishing their part in the change. They claimed qeeroo is their own structure and they wanted to make sure Abiy would fail. His mistake – he co-opted some of OLF security (Dawud Ibsa was offensive OLF[armed wing OLA]) 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 in charge in Oromia from Asmara.

Western Oromia is a hot space for the Oromo struggle. It is the birth place of the OLF, but lots of political groups are trying to ruin the work and hinder the transitional process. The OLF has now split which is good for Abiy because you have one group in western Wollega and then the other is in Addis. I would not rule out the TPFL playing a part in destabilising the country and continuing the friction.

The only political group who has given Abiy the benefit of the doubt and is actually supporting the government by risking their own constitutions and giving the government critical support is the E-ZEMA and former Ginbot 7 leader Berhanu Nega. I can't vouch for any other party because they want to see Abiy and Ethiopia fail.

#### Detention – claims to investigate before arrest and assurances to end torture

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.

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.

I personally expected more Amhara to be more vocal against the arrest, and I want to know why has there has not been more unrest, maybe they know? The official story is he is implicated in the coup attempt. The Amhara are saying the Oromos are actively against the Amhara. The Amhara are saying here are political prisoners and they have done nothing other than being Amhara. Abiy was consistently asked about the arrests of the Amhara, he said it was a coup d'etat - that is how we react.

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 after the coup attempt, don't exaggerate the arrests and the need for them when it could have been worse, this was one of Abiy's tough moments.

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.

### Scale of arrests

The number of arrests is lower than what it is was (pre-Abiy). Where Abiy is weak is in selective justice. We wanted human right violators to be in prison or corruption cases brought before the court, TPLFF have been purged and charged but have equally been replaced by people close to Abiy who also do not have clean hands. This feeds into the rumours and the disenchantment of him because Abiy believes in forgiveness and reconciliation. He has a religious approach to reconciliation. He was signalling that he would not hold those accountable even knowing what they did. Then he moved to more a 'justice' sense of accountability and it was selective. Tigrayans felt targeted It should have been implemented impartially.

We got excited when high profile people were arrested and charged but charging and going through the courts is very long.

The government should be more rigorous in terms of social justice for both the people who need to be charged and the victims. The court cases of high profile people should be more rigorous, fast and more impartial.

The trials are ongoing yet there have been documentaries about it. It is wrong without the judicial process being done first.

### OLF and their commitment to the political process

When the OLF returned they did not come with good faith, they have been waiting for this moment for so long, this new possibility, the OLF wanted nationalism. They are poorly organised but so emotive. They are a symbol. Those following may not even know who the leader is now. At the beginning it was very intellectual and voices of Oromo nationalism. It is now a kind of brand. All of the splinter groups have the name as it is prestigious and emotive.

Abiy offered alternatives to the Oromo with his politics, he took this on whilst against all the other groups across the country. The nationalists, the TPLF are so bitter of the loss of power and now they are both bitter against Abiy.

The OLF are trying to reposition themselves, there are two OLF groups now, one OLF group in the bush have stated that the OLF in Addis have become too soft and said freedom comes from fighting. Then you have the regrouping of the OLF in Addis, who believe it is stupid to fractionalise the group and should be building Oromia up. An Oromo group have taken centre power for the first time, in the past the Oromo were kingmakers but now they have gone one step forward by putting Abiy in power (king).

Jawar Mohamaed is a party in himself. There is a feeling that in the past he was an 'Abiy basher', but now more he is more conciliatory.

There is this feeling that this is an Oromo season and they should not squander this opportunity by fighting amongst themselves. Oromo have taken centre stage. They are appreciating the historic moment but also a feeling that they may lose the opportunity.

Politically, regrouping has occurred and cross-party alliances may be more beneficial. NAMA and ADP should merge, they are so similar. Ethnic nationalism is taking over politics and it has become more important. Abiy should have abolished the OLF and started a brand-new process. The people in Oromia understand his predicament and know they need him. The Amhara are determined to come back to the centre of politics.

### OLF support

OLF will win 100% of the votes in the west of Oromia (where OLF started), but not sure about the rest of the Oromia. Oromia is diverse, both culturally and regionally diverse. Western Oromia is protestant and the rest of Oromia depends where Jawar Mohammed has connection and it depends if he supports OPD or Abiy.

Shewa are pro-Abiy. Real political competition. He is still popular.

NAMA will win in Amhara.

OLF have higher chances of winning because of the emotion behind their party, Abiy may try to charm some area[s] and he is supported in some, but there is a lot of factions in Oromia of groups.

### OLF - government response in Oromia and arrests

Yes, but partly because OLF fight forces. My interpretation is that Abiy believed in inviting them back (he took a risk). When Abiy came to power he really meant he wanted the big 10 parties, he really wanted to bring everyone together. But OLF were impatient. Killing squad in OLF. They abolished local admin structures and were behaving like govt in Wollega. OLF has been very noisy politically. ONLF is conspicuously absent, quiet. They needed time to reconnect with their constituents. They are smarter in their approach. OLF, the day they arrived the commotion started. That was when Abiy was tough for the right reason. Heavy handed yes, did he need to deploy air raids? But OLF were active on the ground, killing officials. OLF are making Western Oromia ungovernable.

### Allegations of thousands of OLF in prison

Maybe but they started it. Abiy has been heavy-handed with the military force but it was necessary, there was killing of civilians and government officials. OLF started it and was very provocative, they said they did not want to disarm when they returned. They really tested the limit.

### Distinction between OLF fighters and 'mainstream' OLF

OLF are mobilising people such as teachers and young people, normal people to join them on mass. 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.

OLF came in September [2018] and the bromance was holding. Abiy was trying to please everyone, but in truth the OLF could have acted like ONLF and this would have made the OLF stronger and it could have built relations with Abiy.

He has been criticised for lack of road mapping and a strategic plan, but things

happen first and it isn't an ideal situation. He made it harder for himself by promising too much in too short of time. He is a bit skittish with his actions.

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## **Wondemagegn Goshu, Addis Ababa University, 20 September 2019**

### **Overview of the current political climate**

The political space in Ethiopia seems to have improved in comparison to how it was in the past. People have political rights, there is the organisation of political opposition, people have freedom of speech, everything seems to appear positive. 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, although we have seen improvements in relative terms in my general assessment. There is no transparency with government and things have not changed in this regard. 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.

If you go to certain areas, e.g. Tigray region, the individual rights are good. But you go to other regions and people face discrimination in areas where they are in the minority. The Somali region seems relatively stable, the Afar region also, but in other places for example the Oromia region, there have been reports on property being seized, human rights abuses, and displacement of people. This is not what the federal government have said or planned, it is the local regional government are acting on their ethnic grouping.

Generally, in my assessment the federal government is respecting individual rights. The instability comes from the local regional governments who have been complicit in abuses. Individuals who belong to different ethnic groups are acting by themselves. Here in Ethiopia, courts and law enforcement are politicised. So they don't always act in connection with the constitution, they act on ethnic lines.

We also see that the government at times cannot protect all people. We hear about people being attacked by groups. The zonal and woreda officers can be complicit in this. The government respects rights, but the protection is lacking in some areas, especially in areas where they don't speak the language or belong to a different ethnic group.

There is also not consistent practice. One day you can speak out, another day you cannot. You see this as well at the different levels of the bureaucracy.

### **Extent to which Abiy has control over security sector**

At the federal government level Abiy has control of the military, police and security forces. At the regional it doesn't appear that Abiy has effective control. Abiy has not consolidated the regional states and their militias, there are some political groups against Abiy and his reforms and this is showing at the regional level. The situation is

volatile, ethnic politics is very dangerous. Abiy comes from Oromia, and the federal officials belonging to different ethnic groups other than Oromo who may not be willing to implement the reform for Abiy for ethnic or other reasons. You can see the danger that arises from certain ethnic groups against each other.

The state is not against him, 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.

Abiy's party is a national party that represents the nation, but the basis of his party is ethnicity. The ODP party is with Abiy. Other Oromo ethnic groups such as OLF and TPLF are against him. The party from the south, it's not clear whether they exist or not. The rise in ethnic tension is challenging to manage.

When Abiy became PM, we were in a happy place with the reforms but today, reforms are in a state of regression. When Abiy is not around and the government aren't enforcing the legal reforms, there are members of the security forces abusing their powers. Abiy can try to redefine the laws and correct them but to how and to what extent can Abiy actually redefine the politics and practice in Ethiopia when there is so much to change.

He might have control, but they defy him. And there is a question of to what extent he can do everything. You also look at his desire for meritocracy, but his own party has a degree of self-interest; they want jobs.

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.

### Profile of people being arrested

One of the problems Abiy faces is there is no trust between the people. There are contradictory reports of arrests coming from different ethnic groups. The different reports add an element of confusion for Abiy to try figure out. We are academics, so we don't go out to investigate; we rely on the media and on civil society.

It is definitely the case that some reports of the arrests are true, for example in Oromia there are military camps for people who have been arrested for their political opinion. But then there are some reports that I do not believe, for example the reports that Abiy has the agenda which is to dominate the Oromo political space, to separate Oromia from Ethiopia. A lot of these types of claims are not accepted amongst the academics here.

In some cases of arrests or human rights abuses, police try to push their own agenda and avenge past crimes by abusing their power.

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.

### Reports of detention in military camps

I am aware of that. I think what they did there was wrong. I think they admitted they made a mistake. They admitted they didn't arrest people because they had

committed a crime; but were preventing people coming from outside to protest in Addis. The government plan was to educate and then release the prisoners. They didn't plan to bring in criminal prosecution, but to educate those people. This is the practice of the previous administration. There is a provision for vagrancy in the criminal justice system. They might be arrested for this. The constitutionality of that provision might be challenged. Under the previous administration they used to do this, and it was for a kind of indoctrination or propaganda. I think those cases happen, but not in the mass cases like you say. Not familiar with how the police handle this.

There are cases of arbitrary arrests happening which are linked to the demonstrations.

There is one situation which I am aware of, where the policemen were beating someone. In the current political atmosphere, there is the perception that the police are more friendly, and you can now approach them, but this is not always the case. There have been some cases of beating of people, all this information comes through social media. The beatings can happen, the system is as it is, there is not much change within the security forces but these are individual incidents.

An important improvement is that prisons used to be a place where torture happened, but now it is not the case.

### Torture

The use of systematic torture by government authorities has ebbed; I do not think it is happening.

I am involved and reporting on the prison reforms now. I have visited the prisons; spoken to federal prisoners; spoken to CSOs and others. The federal prison administration has been reformed, it is the most reformed out of all the reforms, it is the most positive.

I have seen that treatment during detention is good, it is nothing like the previous regime. Families can also visit. The treatment I have seen comes from visits, speaking with federal prison guards and prisoners, things have improved. All positive about prison reform. Members of civil society & prison officers have also spoken.

Torture in prison administrations is something I know nothing of, in fact, the prison guards who used to commit torture within the old regime's prisons have since stopped, some have even been charged. HRC has a mandate to monitor prisons. They can do unexpected visits. This is at the federal level, what is happening at the local regional level may be different.

Can't say for sure about the police.

### Opening of political space: how open is it and ability of political groups to operate freely

There are 3 perspectives:

- 1) By law they must register with the electoral board. Under Abiy the electoral board is good, it is in the best composition it can be. The electoral board is enforcing the laws strictly. There are a lot of tasks for the electoral board to handle and they have capacity issues. The electoral board is starting from zero and there is a lot of change they need to work on. Their offices are not completely operational at present, but they are still building the organisation up. They are trying to build up – regional offices, hire staff etc. At a regional level they are building capacity.

- 2) There is now a space for freedom of expression. People can now (and do) insult the prime minister and government, both have not reacted to these insults. The Prime Minister and government has a commitment to the freedom of expression. There are several papers and TV satellite programmes who are talking about a wide range of things. The main issues that the electoral board and political parties are faced with is, organising the people and youths. In certain regions people have openly said different political groups cannot enter their regions. This for example creates some division. The government is not able to protect everyone in the different regions.
- 3) The political rights of individuals, people – especially the youth – they openly declare that certain groups cannot come to their area, and they will disrupt it if you try. You can divide up the Ethio - [Ethiopian] nationalist parties from the ethno-nationalist parties. And the Govt. is unable to enforce the law in terms of protection in that situation.

We have a referendum (in December [2019]) but cannot discuss and campaign openly. I think this will be the biggest challenge for the electoral board. I heard they had a meeting with the security and police forces yesterday to discuss this.

In terms of politics and elections, the biggest fear comes from individual groups.

If things continue the way they are now – in terms of promoting your agenda for the elections – there is no way it will be free and fair and credible. They may have to think about deploying the military.

#### **Student movement and ability to be politically active**

Students are politically active still but unfortunately not informed properly. Student movements are known from Ethiopian history, the ones who started the revolution and were informed about the politics. We see students who care less about principles, or fundamental logic, but they rely on something else. So; they are active, but not influencing the policy agenda. In Addis Ababa it is ok, but in regional areas everything tends to be identity based.

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#### **William Davison, Crisis Group, 8 October 2019 (telephone interview)**

##### **Political space**

The political space is significantly more open than in 2017, before Abiy became Prime Minister; political prisoners have been released, exiled groups have been allowed to return and high-profile appointments have been made in democratic institutions.

However, the political space is also more contested. Thanks to opening and widening the political space for electoral competition, there is greater dynamism from the opposition. Ethiopian politics is more vibrant than ever and this is largely a positive development. Over the last decades we haven't seen this level of political activity. There is not only a political space for party contestation but it is a more dynamic space for ethnic and ideological demands.

The rise in political liberalisation has also become volatile. It has exposed and put the focus on political rifts within Ethiopia. Not just on ethnic/regional lines, but also political divisions. There are groups that fundamentally disagree on various things such as what Ethiopia's history says about the country and the direction Ethiopia is going to.

As a result, there is politically driven violence, which will likely continue for the future.

### Security forces and Govt. control over them

There are complicated federal dynamics at play, we are seeing increasingly assertive administrations in certain regions. For example, Tigray region has a lot of issues with the ruling coalition and authorities. While Tigray has a strong regional security apparatus, people perhaps exaggerate how autonomous Tigray is. What we have seen through its the failure to arrest the old chief of intelligence, Getachew Assefa, is that the federal government is no longer allowed into the region at will. Mekele is managing its own regional security.

There has been high-level political violence in Amhara region. The Amhara government nominated Asaminew Tsige to become the head of the regional administration/regional security — he was given a considerable scope, budget, autonomy etc., but this then led to confrontations.

The regional security apparatuses are growing in a way that is causing a problem for the regions and for the federal government. The longer running issue is the growth of regional police, which have paramilitary units. To some extent the security apparatus is becoming loyal to the region and so not completely in line with the federal government. These dynamics could cause a lot of damage in the future.

The national defence force is one of the strongest institutions in the government. There is an element of the regional power struggle which is spilling into the military and the assassination raised this question. But in general, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) is an institution that has remained loyal and in line with the federal government.

In the previous regime much of the security apparatus; the military, intelligence agency and the security agencies were all federal agencies that were largely controlled or dominated by Tigrayans and the TPLF. The power shift and removals of people in high positions in the new government and ruling coalition has caused upheaval and has consequently also raised a question over the efficacy of the security organisations.

### Impact on political space of coup attempt

There has been a political response as there were number of arrests made on 22 June. We want to see due process and wider justice reform but it seems there's still some political arrests. Their crackdown looked like the old EPRDF. The political space has 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. This security breakdown brought in a more conciliatory leadership in Amhara, yet it needs to be seen what happens on the ground.

### Touched on crackdown, and 'old' Ethiopia: how does it compare now?

There have been continual arrests in Oromia and there is no clear link between the June 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. Another political move was that Abiy's Security Advisor Temesgen Tiruneh was appointed as the new Amhara regional president, we are yet to see if he is more conciliatory. I am not convinced that you can be a moderate Amhara leader and do a deal with the TPLF and still expect the support in the region.

The planned general election threatens to bring more instability because of the ethno-nationalists political agenda.

### Scale of the arrests - in terms of what happened before

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.

### Sense of what's happening in detention, use of mass detention, torture and detain first; investigate second

In Oromia, we are hearing reports of mass detention but 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.

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.

### Saw recent tweet re: Oromos and their current treatment. Can you expand on this?

Oromo politics is fragmented and complicated with a lot of shifting positions. We have also seen a continuation of the problems since last year amid the return of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a previously banned organization. As a measure to widen the political space, the OLF were allowed to return Ethiopia but the government still labels their 'fighting in the bush' as illegal and therefore continue 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.

OLF is fragmented, but it has returned with renewed political strength, and thus remains a strong threat to the ruling party. The ruling party piggy-backed onto the anti-government protests. Abiy's party, the Oromo Democratic Party, has become the dominant ruling party in the EPRDF coalition.

### How does Govt. distinguish between OLA, OLF, Oromo activists, Oromo

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.

### Govt. interest in Oromo protestors (2014/15/16)

I think key elements of the Oromo reformist parties were sympathetic to the demands of the protestors and understood them fairly quickly. The protestors and the leaders in the regional system cooperated to remove some of the leading powers and dismantle the power structures (which were associated with TPLF).

Look at what the protesters wanted during the protests, they didn't want to just have an Oromo leader they also wanted a strong Oromia region; use of language at national level; end of extractive economic relationship; release of political prisoners and fair power sharing arrangements/representations. If there is still resistance against the government, it is because these questions have not been answered.

### Qeerroo

We need to be cautious when using this term because there are questions that still need to be answered. Who claims to be a member? Are they always a member of the Qeerroo? and who has ownership of the Qeerroo?.

There was a large group of anti-government Oromo protesters. There were some networking between educational institutions, some websites, some messaging groups and a high level of organisation surrounding the successful protest movement. In those groups some identified as Qeerroo. There were cohesive units and a morphing of groups. It is a difficult term and useful term to use but often abused and manipulated by others as much as it is useful.

To what extent were the OLF in control of the Qeerroo? I do not think there is much organisation in this group, they are an insurgency opposition group. OLF is more propaganda than a serious group and this is true for a lot of the groups.

### Estimate of capacity and support for the OLF

The idea of the group resonates a lot (the flag, the name, the organisation). It has the potential for popularity but the OLF is a fragmented group, what looked like the main faction has seemed to have spilt into the Oromo Liberation Front and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). It is a powerful legacy which is struggling to find its place in the democratic political landscape. From my understanding, not only is the OLF fragmented, but not any faction of the OLF has registered as a political group in Addis.

### Rise in ethnic tensions, and assessment of causes

There is a rise in political assertiveness in the current environment where political aspiration is expressed by ethnic identity. The assertiveness is based on regions/ethnicity lines.

Liberalisation of the political space does allow for more space to make demands, express grievances, contest harder for power and resources and settle scores. It's an important political dynamic in Ethiopia right now.

Corresponding with this, Ethiopia has been a weaker state in the last decade. The security apparatus, regions, ruling coalition being able to act as a forum to discuss policy and coordinate has not been as possible as in the past.

The ethnic elements seize the opportunity presented by the liberalisation process when there are weak state institutions that do not have the capacity. The ethnic elements are politically more prominent because this is the first time there has been an open space for dissent since the formation of the federal government on ethnicity lines in 1994.

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