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2 October 2025

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Ethiopia: Police summonses, including legislation and ways of delivering summonses; appearance and content of summonses, including whether there are variations between federal and municipal summonses, and whether any legislation is referenced in the summonses; availability of fraudulent summonses (2023–September 2025)

1. Overview

Sources indicated that the law which regulates summonses in Ethiopia is the 1961 *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia* (Legal consultant 2025-09-12; researcher 2025-09-24).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a legal consultant and attorney at law based in Ethiopia, who is also a former federal public prosecutor, stated that "[s]ummons can be issued for civil and criminal cases" (Legal consultant 2025-09-12).

Sources indicated that the summonses of criminal cases are issued by the police or the court (Legal consultant 2025-09-12; researcher 2025-09-24).

1.1 Summonses to a Suspect or Accused Person

The *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia* indicates the following:

Art. 25. - Summoning of accused or suspected person.

Where the investigating police officer has reason to believe that a person has committed an offence, he may by written summons require such person to appear before him. (Ethiopia 1961, italics in original)

The legal consultant stated that "mere sus[picion]" from the investigating officer is "enough" to issue a police summons (2025-09-12).

The same source indicated that "[i]f the suspect summoned by police is not willing to appear before the investigating police office," the police will obtain an arrest warrant from the court and arrest the suspect (Legal

consultant 2025-09-12). The *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia* provides the following:

Art. 26. — Arrest.

1. Where the accused or the suspect has not been arrested and the offence is such as to justify arrest or where the person summoned under Art. 25 fails to appear, the investigating police officer shall take such steps as are necessary to effect his arrest.
2. Where the arrest cannot be made without warrant, the investigating police officer shall apply to the court for a warrant of arrest in accordance with the provisions of Art. 53. (Ethiopia 1961, italics in original)

The *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia* provides the following regarding summons for a trial:

Art. 123. — Trial to be fixed.

When the charge has been filed under Art. 109, the court shall forthwith fix the date of trial and cause the accused and the public prosecutor to be summoned to appear on the date and at the time fixed by the court. It shall take such steps as are necessary to secure the attendance of the accused, if in custody. (Ethiopia 1961, italics in original)

The *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia* provides the following regarding summonses in cases of petty offences:

Art. 167. - Summoning of accused.

1. Where a petty offence has been committed, the public or private prosecutor shall apply to the court having jurisdiction to summon the accused to appear.
2. The application and the summons shall contain the name of the accused, the circumstances of the petty offence committed and the law and articles of the law to be applied. (Ethiopia 1961, italics in original)

1.2 Summonses to Witnesses

The *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia* provides the following regarding summonses issued to witnesses:

Art. 124. - Witness summonses.

1. So soon as the date of the trial has been fixed, the public prosecutor and the accused shall give the registrar a list of their witnesses and experts, if any, whose presence is necessary. The registrar shall forthwith issue summonses in the form prescribed in the Third Schedule to this Code.

... (Ethiopia 1961, italics in original)

The same source indicates the following about additional witnesses:

Art. 143. - Additional witnesses.

1. The court may at any time before giving judgement call any witness whose testimony it thinks is necessary in the interests of justice.
2. The prosecution and the accused may call any witness whose name does not appear on the list of witnesses. Such witness shall be summoned where the court is satisfied that he is a material witness and the application for a summons is not being made for the purpose of delaying the case.
3. The prosecution may in a case committed for trial to the High Court call any witness who has not given evidence at the preliminary inquiry where he informs the accused in writing of the name of the witness he proposes to call and of the nature of the testimony he will give. (Ethiopia 1961, italics in original)

The website of the Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia indicates that a person officially becomes a witness once they receive a court summons, and "a person who has been summoned by the court has to show up at the set date and time until a decision is reached on the case," unless the court issues another order (Ethiopia n.d.). According to the same source,

[i]f a person does not show up after being summoned by the court to testify as a witness without a compelling reason (as deemed by the court), and if the court finds out that the witness has fled and is intentionally avoiding coming to court, the court has the right to bring the witness detained. (Ethiopia n.d.)

1.3 Methods of Delivery

Sources indicated that summonses issued by the police are also delivered by the police (Legal consultant 2025-09-12; researcher 2025-09-24). The legal consultant added that victims may also deliver police-issued summonses to the suspect, depending on the "gravity of the crime" (2025-09-12).

Sources indicated that summonses issued by the courts are delivered by the police (Legal consultant 2025-09-12; researcher 2025-09-24). In an interview with the Research Directorate and speaking on their own behalf, a researcher and trainer on gender and human rights, who leads an organization focused on women's and children's rights, indicated that court-issued summonses can also be delivered by mail carriers (Researcher 2025-09-24). The same source added that courts can use "specific persons such as bailiffs" to deliver summonses under "special circumstances," such as when a summons requires urgent delivery (Researcher 2025-09-24).

The legal consultant, referring to article 162 of the *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia*, noted that in the case of the hearing taking place in the absence of the accused, the summons will be published in national newspapers, with the date of the hearing and a notification that the accused will be tried in their absence if they fail to appear (2025-09-12).

Article 162 of the *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia* provides the following:

Where the court decides to hear the case in the absence of the accused it shall order the publication of the summons which shall show the date fixed for the hearing. It shall contain a notification to the accused that he will be tried in his absence if he fails to appear. (Ethiopia 1961)

2. Appearance and Content of Summonses

The *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia*, which is available online, contains a template of a summons to appear for trial in Form IX of the Third Schedule, and a template of a witness summons in Form X of the Third Schedule (Ethiopia 1961).

Concerning summonses issued by the police, the legal consultant indicated that key features include the following:

- the names of the suspect
- the name of the police stations or department
- the crime for which the person is suspected
- the date, time, and location of the required appearance
- the signature of the investigation police officer
- the stamp of the police department (2025-09-12).

According to the legal consultant, summonses issued by the courts state that the plaintiff is the public prosecutor (2025-09-12). The source added that other features of the court-issued summonses include:

- the name of the defendant
- the case or file number
- the name of the court
- the criminal charge
- the date, time, and location of the required appearance
- a warning about the consequences of non-compliance, such as default judgment
- a signature from a judicial officer
- a stamp from the court
- as an attachment, documentary evidence from the public prosecutor, detailing the allegations or dispute (Legal consultant 2025-09-12).

The researcher indicated that the content of a summons includes the name, address, gender and sex of the person being summoned, the place and time they are required to appear, the reason why they are being summoned, as well as the header and stamp of the issuing authority, and the signature of a responsible person from the issuing authority (2025-09-24).

The legal consultant noted that summonses are not consistent across Ethiopia, as there are some variations (2025-09-12). The researcher indicated that the format, headers and security features of the summons, including stamps and signatures, may vary depending on the issuing authority; however, the content is consistent (2025-09-24).

According to the legal consultant, summonses can be "partially handwritten" or fully typed, but they are "rare[ly]" fully handwritten (2025-09-12). The researcher indicated that summonses are neither fully typed nor fully handwritten; template forms are typed, then filled in by hand (2025-09-24).

The template of a summons to appear for trial in Form IX of the Third Schedule of the *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia* references article 123 of the Code, and the template of a witness summons in Form X of the Third Schedule of the Code references article 124 (Ethiopia 1961).

A sample of a blank template of the summons to appear issued by the police and provided to the Research Directorate by the researcher, translated from Amharic into both English and French, is attached to this Response; the summons includes a reference to article 25 of the *Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia*.

3. Availability of Fraudulent Summonses

Information on the availability of fraudulent summonses was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The legal consultant reported that forged summonses resembling authentic ones may be found in Ethiopia, but they are not "easy" to obtain (2025-09-12). However, the researcher indicated that "there is a lot of fraud concerning summonses in Ethiopia" (2025-09-24).

When asked how fraudulent summonses are acquired, the legal consultant responded that there are criminal individuals who prepare and deliver such documents (2025-09-12). The researcher indicated that summonses with authentic stamps and signatures issued by Ethiopian authorities can be acquired through illegal means, such as "corrupt" investigating police officers (2025-09-24).

When asked about state efforts to combat fraudulent summonses, the legal consultant responded as follows:

The government has continued in efforts to combat forgery documents including fraudulent summons. There are clear laws that criminalize and penalize preparation of forgery documents including fraudulent summons. There are law enforcement organs working on it. Police have repeatedly arrested criminals working on forgery of documents together with forgery stamps, draft letters with header and footer and other documents and even with prepared forgery documents. Individuals who are involved in preparation of forgery documents are repeatedly penalized. (2025-09-12)

The researcher indicated that there are state measures and criminal laws to combat fraudulent summonses; however, these cases are "rarely" reported and, therefore, enforcement bodies largely remain unaware of them (2025-09-24).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Ethiopia. 1961. Proclamation No. 185 of 1961. Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia. [Accessed 2025-09-04]

Ethiopia. N.d. Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia. "Information for Witnesses." [Accessed 2025-09-10]

Legal consultant. 2025-09-12. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Researcher. 2025-09-24. Interview with the Research Directorate.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Addis Ababa University International Humanitarian Law Clinic; Ethiopia – Embassy of Ethiopia in Ottawa, Legal and Justice Affairs Advisory Council of Ethiopia, Ministry of Justice; Ethiopian Catholic Church Social and Development Commission; Ethiopian Human Rights Council; Ethiopian Lawyers' Association; Ethiopian Red Cross Society; Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association; Fédération internationale pour les droits humains; Jesuit Refugee Service – Ethiopia branch; Justice Aid Ethiopia; lawyers practising criminal law in Ethiopia (25); Norwegian Refugee Council; Pan African Lawyers Union; UN – International Organization for Migration; Womankind Worldwide Ethiopia.

Internet sites, including: *Addis Fortune*; *Africa Confidential*; Africanews; *The Africa Report*; Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia; Austrian Red Cross – ecoi.net; Baker McKenzie; BBC; Belgium – Commissariat général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides; Borkena; *Capital*; CIVICUS; Ethiopia – Ethiopian Government Electronic Services, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice; Ethiopiaid Canada; Ethiopia Insight; Ethiopian Association in the Greater Toronto Area and Surrounding Region; Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation; Ethiopian Canadian Community Association in Edmonton; *Ethiopian Herald*; Ethiopian Lawyers' Association; Ethiopian News Agency; *Ethiopian Review*; Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio; Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association; EU – Public Register of Authentic Travel and Identity Documents Online; Factiva; Fana Media Corporation; Fédération internationale pour les droits humains; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; Freedom House; The Habesha; *Horn Affairs*; Human Rights Watch; Norway – Landinfo; The Reporter; Transparency International; UK – Home Office; UN – ReliefWeb; US – Department of State; Voice of America; Yabele Media.

Attachment

Ethiopia. N.d. Nefas Selke Lafto Sub-District Police Station. Blank sample of a summons to appear in Amharic. Translated into English and French by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada. Sent to the Research Directorate by the researcher, 2025-09-24.

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2024-01-23