



HMUN 2025

Discussing the deteriorating human rights abuses
in Ethiopia

HRC

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Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Discussing the deteriorating human rights abuses in Ethiopia

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Introduction

Ethiopia, Africa's second-most populous country, is located in the Horn of Africa and is bordered by Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. Ethiopia is home to more than 90 ethnicities, with the Oromo (34%) and the Amhara (27%) being the largest. It also has over 80 languages. While this creates cultural diversity, it also leads to conflicts and disagreements between different ethnic groups, dragging Ethiopia into chaos and instability.

During the Tigray War between 2020-2022, resulting in the signing of the Pretoria Agreement and the tensions in the Oromia and Tigray regions, the Ethiopian government fought against different ethnic groups. These conflicts led to numerous human rights abuses, harming and displacing millions. By the end of 2022, almost 4 million people in Ethiopia were internally displaced due to ethnic and political violence, and 600,000 people were estimated to die as a result of the Tigray War. Furthermore, in 2022, more than 20 million in Ethiopia needed humanitarian assistance. It is also reported that approximately 43% of women in Northern Ethiopia, also known as Tigray, experienced at least one type of gender-based violence. The violence and unrest in the regions continue even when the conflicts finalize.

Although some efforts have been made to solve the issue, significant progress has yet to be made. Therefore, the issue should be addressed and discussed, and solutions should be created with immediate effect.

Definition of Key Terms

Amhara

A regional state in northern Ethiopia, it is the homeland of the Amhara Awi, Xamir, Argobba, and Qemant people. Its capital is Bahir Dar.

Asylum seeker

A person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country but hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim.

Fano militia

An ethno-nationalist Amhara militia and former protest movement.

Federal government

A form of government in which power is distributed between a central authority and several constituent territorial units.

Human rights

Rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.

Internal displacement

Forced movement of individuals or groups within their own country's borders due to conflict, violence, human rights violations, natural disasters, or other crises.

International law

A set of rules and principles governing the relations and conduct of sovereign states with each other, as well as with international organizations and individuals.

Oromia

The largest regional state in Ethiopia represents 34% of the country's territory. It is the homeland of the Oromo people, and its capital is Addis Ababa.

Pan-Africanism

A movement for the political union of all the African nations.

Political entity

A unit with political responsibilities.

Refugee

A person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there.

Sanction

An action is taken or an order is given to force a country to obey international laws by limiting or stopping trade with that country, not allowing economic aid for that country, etc.

Tigray

The northernmost regional state in Ethiopia is the homeland of the Tigrayan, Irob, and Kunama people. Its capital is Mekelle.

General Overview

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was the dominant party in Ethiopia's ruling coalition from 1991 to 2018. It implemented the federal system, which granted ethnic regions significant autonomy. This fueled ethnic tensions over political representation, territorial disputes, and historical grievances.

For example, on April 12, 2015, protests began in the Oromia region against the government's Addis Ababa Master Plan, officially known as the Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan. This urban growth project, proposed in 2014, was designed to integrate the capital with surrounding towns and rural areas in the Oromia region. More than 20 small towns would be incorporated, and the boundaries of Addis Ababa in the Oromia region would increase. The project further included proposals for new industrial zones, transportation networks, and residential areas to support the capital's growing population. This would eventually ensure that urbanization was managed more effectively while the development was accomplished rapidly. Alongside creating job opportunities, it would also enhance economic growth by boosting investment and modernizing the agriculture sector in rural areas.

However, it received immense opposition, particularly from the Oromo people. They viewed the project as a threat to their land rights and cultural integrity because they feared getting marginalized. Notably, the farmers disliked the idea as they did not want to lose their ancestral lands. During the protests, the Ethiopian federal forces evinced violence on the people, increasing the tension. Following this, on the 9th of October 2016, the Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency due to the ongoing protests and the current evoking of violence. Many people were arrested, and many were killed and injured, abusing many human rights.

Subsequently, after Abiy Ahmed became the new Prime Minister in 2018, finalizing the overwhelming authority of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopian politics, the situation did not get any better. His dream of a unified Ethiopian state contrasted with the past government's ideology. The ethnic and political tensions continued, and conflicts escalated. Throughout his governance, Abiy Ahmed failed to address the voices of the different ethnic regions.

The signing of a peace deal with Eritrea on the 5th of June 2018 further escalated tensions with the TPLF as the TPLF had territorial and historical disagreements with Eritrea. Furthermore, the TPLF viewed these actions as a threat to its existence. Throughout the process, the government and the opposition accused each other of being accountable for the country's unstable state. The mutual distrust led to chaos.

On the 23rd of June 2018, a failed grenade attack targeted the Prime Minister, resulting in many getting injured and one person getting killed. On 29th of June 2020, Oromo singer and activist Hachalu Hundessa was assassinated, which led to protests and federal violence. After, the Ethiopian government accused the TPLF of attacking federal military bases in Tigray to seize weapons and equipment. Following this, on the 4th of November 2020, the government launched a military attack on the TPLF as a "law enforcement operation" in order to reinstate the order. This marked the beginning of the Tigray War, which would end on the 2nd of November 2022, with the signing of the Pretoria Agreement in South Africa. The Eritrean military and the Amhara regional forces, such as the Fano militia, fought alongside the Ethiopian government during the war. Amhara people believed that areas such as Wolkait and Raya in the Tigray region historically belonged to them, influencing their decision to battle the TPLF. It was reported that parties involved in the war had violated innumerable human rights, displaced millions, and caused millions to suffer and die. It was noted that sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, and targeting of civilian infrastructure were widespread during the war. However, even after the war, it is stated that the Eritrean military troops had remained in the borders, continuing the violations of human rights. It is also known that despite signing a peace deal, the tension between the parties carries on.

In 2023, tensions escalated between the federal government and regional forces in the Amhara region, mainly the Fano militia. This was due to the political, ethnic, and territorial struggles of the Amhara people. They were constantly attacked, especially in the Oromia region, and marginalized by the oppressive government, sparking the Amhara nationalism. In such circumstances, groups like Fano, an Amhara nationalist militia, gained prestige among the Amhara people. The government addressed them as terrorists and launched attacks on them as they were a threat to national unity. This further fueled the motives behind the Amhara attacks on the federal government. As a result, the government declared a state of emergency in the Amhara region due to the ongoing violence and the deteriorating situation. During the clashes, both parties abused numerous human rights, making the situation even worse.

The situation remains complicated in regions such as Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray. Conflicts and tensions continue, and human rights are violated daily.

Timeline of Key Events

Date

12th of April 2015

Event

Protests began in the Oromia region over the government's Addis Ababa Master Plan. Government forces indicated violence towards the people involved in the protests.

9th of October 2016

The Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency due to months of protests and security forces replying with violence. This resulted in mass arrests, killings, and violations of freedoms.

2nd of April 2018

Abiy Ahmed was elected as the new Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

5th of June 2018

Ethiopia and Eritrea have signed a peace deal in Saudi Arabia, officially ending the twenty-year war.

23rd of June 2018

A failed grenade attack targeted Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed during a public rally in Addis Ababa. One person was killed, and many were injured.

29th of June 2020

Oromo singer and activist Hachalu Hundessa was assassinated, leading to protests. As a

result, more than 200 people were killed in clashes, and thousands were arrested.

4th of November 2020

The Ethiopian government launched an attack on the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), beginning the war.

2nd of November 2022

The Pretoria Agreement, in South Africa, was signed between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, ending the war and advocating peace between parties.

April 2023

Tension between the federal forces and the Fano militia in the Amhara region rose, leading to arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings.

July 2023

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission documented ongoing sexual violence against women in the Tigray region.

4th of August 2024

A state of emergency was declared in the Amhara region due to the ongoing violence.

Major Parties Involved

Amhara Regional Force

During the Tigray War, Amhara regional forces, including the Fano Militia, fought alongside the Ethiopian and Eritrean military against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). It was reported that the forces have conducted dreadful human rights abuses, particularly in the Western Tigray region, which they claim to be historically theirs. It was further noted that Amhara authorities burned Tigrayan ID cards and reissued citizens with Amhara identity cards, forcing them only to speak Amharic. Their main motive was to weaken Tigray's economic and political independence and to "Amharize" the Tigrayan people. However, in 2023 and 2024, conflict between Amhara forces and the Ethiopian military escalated in the Amhara region, the second most populous region in the country, due to territorial disagreements. During the ongoing conflict, many human rights are violated by both sides, displacing and harming thousands. The conflict also threatens the national unity of the country as well as the stability of the government, showing how fragile the government is towards rebel attacks.

African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) plays a pivotal role in addressing the human rights abuses in Ethiopia and ensuring peace in the region. The Pretoria Agreement signed between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 2022, ending the two-year war, was a result of the effort shown by the African Union (AU) as they were responsible for moderating the peace talks between the parties. However, Addis Ababa hosting the headquarters building of the African Union (AU) and Ethiopia being identified as a home for Pan-Africanism raises questions about the AU's current muted stance on the ongoing atrocities in the regions of Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray. Authorities accuse the AU of refraining from addressing the issue. At the same time, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was also displeased with the idea of the African Union serving as a third-party mediator, accusing it of bias. On the other hand, the African Union's significance is sustained as the human rights abuses in the region are ongoing, and the violence has not entirely stopped.

Eritrean Government and Military

The restrictive Eritrean government led by Isaias Afwerki, allied with Ethiopia, played a remarkable role in the issue. During the Tigray conflict, Eritrea sent troops to help the Ethiopian government, particularly in the Northern Tigray region. The Eritrean military contributing to battling

the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) caused the war to reach a much larger scale, creating devastating consequences. The military intervention links back to the ongoing disagreements between TPLF and the Eritrean government and the long-standing hatred between the parties. During the war, the intervention was further associated with "the existence and sovereignty of the nation," and it was said that TPLF must be buried. It was also reported that Eritrean troops were targeting civilians, particularly those of the Tigray ethnicity. Furthermore, the troops were committing other severe crimes against humanity, such as sexual violence, forced displacement, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Even after the Tigray War resulted in the signing of the Pretoria Agreement, which called for the withdrawal of foreign forces from the region, the Eritrean troops were still present in the border areas, continuing the abominations.

Ethiopian Government and Military

The Ethiopian government, led by Abiy Ahmed, and the Ethiopian military have been accused of violating innumerable human rights during the Tigray War and the conflicts in the Amhara and Oromia region. Furthermore, the government has faced criticism for restricting freedoms during the conflicts. Journalists with opposing views were taken into custody, and other unlawful arrests were made. Although the Pretoria Agreement was signed, authorities criticized the Ethiopian government for the slow implementation of transitional justice in the Tigray region and for not addressing the human rights abuses in the Amhara and Oromia regions.

European Union

The European Union highlights the importance of peace dialogues and encourages negotiations between parties. Furthermore, it urges steps to be taken according to international law and calls for a ceasefire with immediate effect. Although imposing no sanctions, the EU requests that human rights abuse investigations be carried out on individuals and political entities.

Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)

The Oromo Liberation Army, also known as the Oromo Liberation Front, represents the Oromo people and claims to fight for their rights as they were marginalized and oppressed for decades. It is recognized as a terrorist organization by the government as they are accused of perpetrating attacks on civilians, government officials, and infrastructure. The ongoing disagreements led to a conflict in the Oromia region between the OLA and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, where both parties are accused of violating human rights due to extrajudicial killings and forced displacements. The conflict threatens national unity and struggles the Ethiopian

government as well as leading to more people dying and more human rights abuses being conducted.

Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

The Tigray People's Liberation Front ruled Ethiopia in the past and was a dominant party in Ethiopian politics for decades. After Abiy Ahmed's rise to power, the TPLF, representing the Tigrayan people, became his primary opponent. Following this, tension between the TPLF and the federal government escalated, leading to a war due to disagreements over power distribution and political reforms. Although the Tigray War between the parties resulted in the signing of the Pretoria Agreement, violence in the region is ongoing, and the aftermath of the conflict is creating devastating consequences. It is reported that both parties violated human rights during the conflict, leading to many casualties on both sides. The TPLF also has disagreements with the Amharic people and the Eritrean government due to past conflicts and historical matters.

Neighboring Countries

Countries such as Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan border Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa and are of strategic importance on the issue. While crucial for peace talks, these countries have taken the initiative to accept refugees and asylum seekers from Ethiopia and offer them a home. For instance, 41.3% of the refugees and asylum seekers in Djibouti consist of Ethiopian people, while Kenya hosts 42,352 Ethiopians and Sudan 43,677. Despite facing an ongoing conflict and various struggles, Somalia has also taken responsibility for hosting refugees and asylum seekers coming from their neighboring states. Hosting a large Ethiopian population debilitates the already fragile economies of these countries as the demand for goods skyrockets. Additionally, social tensions occur, and inequalities increase, possibly further destabilizing their governments.

United Nations

The United Nations is extremely concerned about the issue, providing Ethiopia with food, shelter, and medical aid to assist those in need. Furthermore, the UN addresses the issue in summits, focusing on ensuring the well-being and security of people affected by violence, investigating human rights abuses, and fully resolving conflicts to bring peace to the region. The United Nations also urges the Ethiopian government to address the deteriorating human rights abuses.

United States

The United States recognizes the human rights abuses in the region by recalling that the Ethiopian military, Eritrean military, and the members of the Amhara forces have committed crimes against humanity, including rape, murder, sexual violence, and persecution. The United States further condemns the ethnic cleansing in western Tigray, urging the most responsible ones to be held accountable. While standing against the suffering, the US calls for justice and investigations according to international law. Additionally, the US indicates utmost care in ensuring peace in the region and participates in diplomatic efforts. Alongside supporting the Pretoria Agreement, the US also welcomed other peace efforts, such as the Ankara Declaration signed between Ethiopia and Somalia on December 11, 2024, which intended to find a common ground between the countries. This implies that the US does not only advocate tranquility in Ethiopia but also tranquility in the entire Horn of Africa. Moreover, the US has imposed several sanctions against those who have been involved in the conflict in Ethiopia since it was marked that the situation threatened peace and the national security of the United States.

Possible Solutions

There are multiple ways to address the issue, even though it is complex and challenging to resolve fully. Although several possible solutions exist, it is essential to ensure cooperation between member states in implementing such actions.

Firstly, international pressure could be applied to individuals and political entities responsible for human rights abuses by imposing economic sanctions and travel restrictions targeted on them. These actions would demonstrate that such violations are not accepted and are condemned. They would also dissuade the accountable parties from the ongoing abuses.

Secondly, encouraging the conduct of in-depth investigations into human rights abuses in the region is significant to ensure accountability and justice in the region. Organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union could be incited to investigate and document human rights violations in the region regularly. It is also vital that the results of such investigations are addressed and discussed. Following this, individuals and political entities would be judged according to international law.

Additionally, helping the populations affected by the conflicts is a possible solution to address the issue in the short term. This would refer to providing financial and humanitarian aid to Ethiopia, particularly to the regional governments of the states most affected by the conflicts. Furthermore, basic needs such as housing, food, and essential services for displaced people within Ethiopia and neighboring countries hosting Ethiopian refugees could be provided.

Another possible solution would be to encourage peace talks and negotiations between parties to resolve the disagreements and ensure regional peace. The United Nations, the African Union, and international actors could serve as moderators in the peace talks between the stakeholders.

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