

34th Special Report

Serious Destructions Resulting from Ethnic Governance

September 18, 2000

Introduction

It is a known fact that Ethiopia is composed of different groups of people who have forged a strong historical, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural alliance. Through their long history of living together, these groups of people have been able to tame their linguistic, ethnic, religious, and cultural differences and develop a strong culture of unity and cooperation among themselves.

Nevertheless, since the establishment of a government based on ethnicity in 1991, the people are being pushed from different directions into abandoning the above cultural heritages and focus instead on the differences among them. The harmfulness of this ethnic-based policy that the government is pursuing has been shown by the ethnic conflicts that occurred in Borena and Arsi zones, Harar, Benishangul, Minjar and Shenkora wereda, Semen Omo, Gedeo and Guji, and other places during the past nine years. These ethnic conflicts have shown clearly that additional and more frightening problems than the many endemic social and economic ones await the Ethiopian people.

In its 32nd special report regarding the danger posed by the dispute over land between Oromo and Amhara peasants in North Shewa, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) had this to say about the indifference of government officials at different levels of responsibility:

"The absence of any authority to assume the responsibility of attending to disputes between members of different ethnic groups living in adjacent regions has continued to give rise to frequent misunderstandings in different parts of the country. These disputes have at times developed into serious conflicts, resulting in the death and displacement of many citizens and the destruction of public and private property."

An Ethnic Partisanship in Eastern Wellega

Recently, members of *wereda* councils went around their respective *weredas* and, mobilising the people, committed serious infringements against those peasants who had come from the Amhara Region and settled in Eastern Wellega. This illegal action is a result of leadership based on ethnicity.

Beginning in March 2000, council members as well as administrative officials in Eastern Wellega in general and especially in Seredeno, Abidengero, Ghida Kiramo, and Awaro *weredas*, caused the burning of houses and churches, the looting of household and church property, including cattle and other domestic animals, the illegal detention, beating and wounding of people whose exact number is unknown at present as well as the death of eight Amhara peasants who had been either displaced from their original region or brought for resettlement purposes. Eight persons were also killed in the conflict.

These *wereda* and regional officials were direct participants in the illegal actions taken against the Amhara peasants. In doing so, they are responsible for leading toward ethnic conflict and the disruption of the culture of respect and tolerance that had characterised the historical relationship of the Oromo and Amhara living in the area.

Since 1970 thousands of Amhara peasants from Gojjam and Gonder and especially from Gaint, Yilmana Densa, Qwarit, Kessela and other *weredas* had been displaced from their lands by repeated drought as well as by the recent, unjust land-redistribution carried out in the region. These peasants who had been left with no land and means of supporting themselves and their families settled in Eastern Wellega *weredas* that were adjacent to their regions of origin. This they did believing that Eastern Wellega was also their country. Unfortunately, recently, officials of their new settlements mounted a campaign to drive these Amhara peasants out of Eastern Wellega. In addition, they took illegal actions that violated the human rights of the peasants. They took these illegal actions because, in the words of these local officials, "displaced Amharas"

1. "have destroyed the forest for purposes of house construction and farming.
2. "between June 15 and 16, the councils of the concerned *weredas* have passed a resolution that Amharas should leave.
3. "the Amhara regional state has requested that the peasants should be returned to it, since they have failed to pay tax as well as their fertiliser loans.

4. "Article 39 of the FDRE constitution provides us with this right."

On the bases of complaints it had received, EHRCO has ascertained that the following violations have been committed against the peasants:

- a. Eight persons have been illegally killed.
- b. An unknown number of others have been shot and wounded
- c. Wives and daughters of the peasants have been raped
- d. Thousands of peasants have been beaten, detained, their houses and properties burnt down and/or looted, and they themselves driven out.

Details of the Violations Against the Peasants

- In March 2000, local officials illegally detained an unknown number of peasants in Gida Kiramo and other *weredas* allegedly for destroying the forest. The peasants are still in detention.
- On 21 June 2000, the same officials mobilised their Oromo supporters and ordered, "Amhara peasants should leave the area". Then assisted by the militia and police they went out on a public demonstration carrying placards with the slogan "Amhara go to your country", caused churches and peasants' houses to be set on fire, properties to be looted, flour mills to be destroyed, peasants' livestock to be either slaughtered or looted.
- On 16 June 2000, they caused St. Gabriel's church to be set on fire and its property looted.
- On 17 June 2000, the army was brought and encamped in the area. The victimised peasants hoped for the protection of this army. Unfortunately, the army - either because it neglected its responsibility or because its mission was such - collaborated with the victimisers and ignored the burning down and looting of three churches, houses of many peasants, and the confiscation of the peasants' livestock.
- On 17 June 2000, council members and officials of Abidengero *Wereda* gathered armed persons and declared, "All Amhara should return to your country". When the Amhara peasants protested and demanded, "Why do we have to return?", the officials replied, "The Amhara regional state has requested that you return because you have failed to pay tax and your fertiliser loans". They then ordered the peasants to get ready to return.
- The next day, a large number of armed people came to the *wereda* and drove the women and children to a nearby forest. When the Amhara peasants protested saying, "While we (the men) are here, you should not take the women and

children anywhere", the armed people opened fire. The houses of Amhara peasants in the *wereda* were set on fire, their household properties and livestock were looted, and the peasants ran away for their lives, families were separated, women and children were left without any shelter.

- On 25 June 2000 at about 1 in the afternoon, an organised group of individuals in Gida Kiramo *Wereda*, Gudina Jiregna peasant association, at a place called Chabsu, looted the properties of Amhara peasants, set their houses on fire, and killed three people.
- In total, the following persons lost their lives as a result of the conflict:

□

	Deceased's Name	Age	Place of Killing	Date of Killing
1	Ato Zelalem Alem	25	Kiramo Wereda	25/06/2000
2	Ato Mihret Almaw	-	>> >>	>> >>
3	Dar Eskedar Adis	?	>> >>	>> >>
4	Ato Molla Yusuf	30	Chebsu, Gida Kiramo Wereda	>> >>
5	Ato Kemal Dawd	32	Kiramo Wereda	15/07/2000
6	Ato Yimer Kemal	35	>> >>	>> >>
7	Child Gebeyehu Tiruneh	1	>> >>	>> >>
8	Child Yenenesh Misganaw	3	>> >>	>> >>

- According to information received by EHRCO, thousands of people have been displaced from the afore-mentioned *weredas* in Eastern Wellega. Many of these people are still in temporary shelters in Eastern Wellega. Many others have returned to their places of origin. From among the latter group of people, the following 55 peasants had returned to Eastern Wellega hoping to salvage some of their properties. Because of unbearable difficulty they encountered, these peasants were once more forced to return to the Amhara region on August 9, 2000.

	Name	Problem encountered		Name	Problem encountered
1	Yitayew Ayalew	House set on fire	29	Aleme Alemayehu	House burned & property looted
2	Mengesha Ewnetu	>> >>	30	Zelege Ewnetu	>> >>
3	Endale Dilnesa	House burned & property looted	31	Belay Tadege	>> >>
4	Simegn Yihune	>> >>	32	Anmaw Alamir	>> >>
5	Yihune Abebe	>> >>	33	Demis Alemahehu	>> >>
6	Meles Tamir	>> >>	34	Melaku Admasu	>> >>
7	Wubishet Terefe	>> >>	35	Makonnen Eskezia	>> >>
8	Yaregal Tamir	>> >>	36	Taye Abiyu	>> >>
9	Asef Desalegn	>> >>	37	Enkwaneh Kebede	>> >>
10	Misganaw Getaneh	>> >>	38	Amare Admasu	>> >>
11	Teshome Gebeyehu	>> >>	39	Lake Gizachew	>> >>
12	Lakew Wasse	>> >>	40	Enawgaw Mengistu	>> >>
13	Molla Jembere	>> >>	41	Bayle Zerihun (priest)	>> >>
14	Yirga Abelu	>> >>	42	Endalew Bekalu	>> >>

15	Mengistu Wudneh	>> >>	43	Tilahun Wudale	>> >>
16	Walle Yirsaw	>> >>	44	Mesenbet Engida	>> >>
17	Tessema Zinaw	>> >>	45	Addis Mehari	>> >>
18	Simegn Binamaw	>> >>	46	Lake Birhanu	>> >>
19	Minwuye Makonnen	>> >>	47	Anley Birhanu	>> >>
20	Tazebew Muche	>> >>	48	Shita Abebe	>> >>
21	Anmaw Wonde	>> >>	49	Tibebu Belete	>> >>
22	Dereje Sinishaw	>> >>	50	Yhwala Eshet	>> >>
23	Sewnet Anmaw	>> >>	51	Addis Ayicheh	>> >>
24	Aregaw Ayalew	>> >>	52	Alemu Zeru	>> >>
25	Alemu Moges	>> >>	53	Bekele Zeru	>> >>
26	Derejew Abebe	>> >>	54	Gizachew Kebede	>> >>
27	Muniye Gashu	>> >>	55	Getnet Wale	>> >>
28	Aschale Yihun	>> >>			

- From the beginning, the peasants had appealed in vain to the concerned government authorities, including those of the Amhara regional state, to stop these illegal actions against them. Consequently, those who were forced to return to their places of origin are faced with serious problems of survival for lack of either shelter or land to till. Even though many of them have lost their houses and other property, they have remained in temporary shelters in Eastern Wellega, facing considerable hardships and waiting for government relief assistance. Except for some wheat, blankets, and first aid medical assistance given to only a few of them, no attempt has been made to re-establish these peasants in the long run. Nor has any legal action been taken so far against the individuals and government officials who committed the gross and illegal actions against these peaceful and innocent citizens.

Conclusion

As pointed out above, among the main and positive factors for which Ethiopia has been known worldwide has been the population's ability - despite its ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity – to live together for thousands of years in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation, and peaceful resolution of common problems. Indeed, its population's past and present diversity have been the country's historical and cultural assets rather than its liabilities.

As of recent times, however, the positive cultural assets that the people had been able to develop over many years have been put under considerable test. Particularly, since 1991 when a political system based on the ethnic, linguistic and other cultural differences among the people was established, the people of the country's different regions are being led into serious conflicts, resulting in many persons being killed, physically injured, displaced from their houses and properties, and in the destruction of considerable private and public property. In the various regular and special reports it has issued so far, EHRCO had reported the conflict between communities of Amhara and Oromo, Oromo and Somali, Oromo and Gedeo, Welaita and Gamo, etc. These reports had also shown the destructions that ensued from these conflicts. EHRCO believes that these reports indicate clearly the serious danger posed by ethnic-based governance.

and federal officials and armed security persons have been further compounding the problem, thereby threatening public security and peace. Consequently, EHRCO calls upon the government to

1. search for culturally appropriate and peaceful mechanisms of resolving ethnic conflicts that occur among the Ethiopian people.
2. bring an end to all ethnically motivated actions that magnify the ethnic, religious, linguistic and other cultural differences that exist among the people, while undermining those cultural heritages that contribute to the people's unity.
3. bring to justice those individuals, government officials, and armed security persons that are responsible for the ethnic conflict, the loss of life, and the destruction of private and public property in Eastern Wellega as reported in this report.
4. see to it that the victimised peasants and their families in Eastern Wellega get appropriate compensation for their losses and that they are provided with the necessary assistance for their re-establishment in the long run.

EHRCO would like to make an urgent call to all individuals and organisations concerned by the danger posed in this regard to write to the following bodies and officials of the Ethiopian Government supporting the above demands:

Copy to:

- Council of Peoples Representatives
P. O. Box: 80001; Fax: (251-1) 550900; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Federal Council, FDRE
P. O. Box: 80001; Fax: (251-1) 550900; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- H.E. Dr. Negasso Gidada, FDRE President
P. O. Box: 1031; Fax (251-1) 552020; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the FDRE
P. O. Box: 1031; Fax (251-1) 552020; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- H.E. Ato Woredewold Wolde, FDRE Minister of Justice
P. O. Box: 1370; Fax : (251-1) 550722; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Oromia Regional Council
P. O. Box 272; Fax: (251-05) 518722; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Amhara Regional Council

P.O.Box 312; Fax: (251-8) 201068; Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

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