

35th Special Report

Ethnic Conflict: A Dangerous Problem of the Utmost Concern

November 2, 2000

Introduction

Ethnic conflict has become a dangerous problem of the utmost concern in the country. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) has issued several reports indicating that governance based on ethnicity, introduced in the country in 1991, is causing considerable destruction to the lives and properties of citizens. Among these reports, which were disseminated to the public at large, the government and all concerned were EHRCO's

- 13th regular report issued in November 1999 which described the destruction caused by the conflict between Guji Oromo and Gedeo ethnic groups;
- 27th and 29th special reports, issued in December 1999 and January 2000 respectively, reporting on the serious contradiction that had ensued between various groups and especially between Welaita and Gamo ethnic groups in North Omo Zone;
- 32nd special report issued in February 2000 regarding the potentially dangerous conflict between Oromo and Amhara peasants in North Shewa; and
- 34th special report of September 23, 2000 that described some of the destruction caused by the conflict between members of the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups in Eastern Wellega.

In its 34th special report of September 23, 2000, EHRCO had stated that

"Instead of endeavouring to find just and fair resolutions to ethnic conflicts, regional 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

- *search for culturally appropriate and peaceful mechanisms of resolving ethnic conflicts that occur among the Ethiopian people.*
- *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.*

- *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.*
- *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."*

Unfortunately, the failure of the government to give the matter due attention has now resulted in the spread of the problem to regions other than Eastern Wellega where the conflict between the Oromo and Amhara is reportedly continuing. That this is happening is shown by the recent and highly destructive conflict that occurred in Borena Zone, Arero Wereda. The government's failure to give the problem appropriate and urgent attention points at its inability to understand that it is responsible, over and above anyone else, for the human and material destruction caused by these conflicts.

On the bases of information gathered by EHRCO, the causes and consequences of the recent conflict in Borena Zone are presented below.

The Ethnic Conflict in Borena Zone, Arero Wereda

The Causes of the Conflict

For generations, members of the Geri and Borena Oromo lived in Arero Wereda, Borena Zone in Oromiya region. Both ethnic groups are represented in the executive body of the *wereda* council. While working together in the council, they were faced with a serious problem that they were unable to resolve. This problem had to do with ownership of land which both groups claimed beginning from 1991. To date, the *wereda* council has been unable to resolve this dispute over land. The Borena Oromo have since been telling the Geri saying, "The land on which you are now living has been ours for a long time. At the present moment you are using our grazing land and water wells", telling them at the same time to vacate the area. The Geri, on their part, refused to leave the area, asserting that the land is also theirs. After that, the dispute between the two ethnic groups worsened and led to a serious conflict.

The misunderstanding and hatred between the two groups that had been muffled for many years finally broke out in the violent attack of the Geri by the Borena at about 9 o'clock in the evening of September 7, 2000. A coalition of some 60 Borena and Guji Oromo, armed with modern and traditional weapons, attacked Geri residents of Meta Gefersa in Borena Zone, Arero Wereda, causing considerable destruction to human life and property. While EHRCO has been able to verify some of the destructions caused by the conflict as summarised in Table 1 below, reports that have and continue to reach it

indicate that the destruction to human life and property may actually be higher than reported here.

Table 1. Summary of the destruction caused by the conflict

	<i>Type of destruction</i>	<i>Size of destruction</i>
1	Humans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Killed • Wounded 	75 33
2	Houses destroyed by fire	9
3	Domestic animals looted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cattle • Goats • Mules • Camels 	570 1624 16 176
4	Looted money in cash	Over 80,000 Birr

The details of the destructions summarised in Table 1 above are presented in Tables 2 and 3 below:

I. Killed by Gunshot and Other Traditional Weapons

Table 2. Full names and brief descriptions of the persons killed

	<i>Full name of deceased</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Brief description of circumstance</i>
1	Abdi Aliyu Molu	Male	60	Shot and killed and the facial skin peeled off while sheltering for safety at the wereda council's office
2	Menur Mediker Aliyo	?	57	Same as above
3	Alew Ibrahim Hassen	?	31	Same as above
4	Nishow Ibren Yisak	?	37	Same as above
5	Abrosh Edin Mohammed	?	35	Same as above
6	Mohammed Haji Ali?	?	64	Shot and killed while sheltering for safety at the wereda council's office
7	Ibrahim Ali Yisak	?	60	Same as above
8	Eden Bereyohu Mohammed	?	53	Set on fire while at home
9	Abdrahman Abdo?	?	25	Same as above
10	Mohammed Aliyu Abdella	?	17	Same as above
11	Mohammed Menur Mediker	?	15	Same as above
12	Edin Geraw Yisak	?	13	Same as above
13	Aliyu Iya Ketelo	?	20	Same as above
14	Abdunur Ali Kula	?	5	Same as above
15	Edin Yisak	Male	6	Set on fire while at home
16	Edin M/Aliyu Ibren	"	10	Same as above
17	Mohammed Hassen Mohammed	"	5	Same as above
18	Yisak Aliyu Hassen	"	3	Same as above

19	Yisak Mohammed Mure	"	9	Same as above
20	Hassen Edin	"	11	Same as above
21	Ali Abdilahi Aliyu	"	5	Same as above
22	Yisak Ali Kula1[1]	"	3	Same as above but with three other family members

Table 2. Full names and brief descriptions of the persons killed (cont'd)

	<i>Full name of deceased</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Brief description of circumstance</i>
23	Ibrahim Aliyu Nura	"	3	Set on fire while at home
24	Aliyu Nura M/Mustafa	"	45	Same as above
25	Hussen Shimoy Hassen	"	10	Same as above
26	Mohammed Gerew Yisak	"	10	Same as above
27	Yisak Mohammed Buli	"	16	Same as above
28	Ibren Edin Jirow	"	52	Same as above
29	Aden Mohammed Kunu	"	32	Same as above
30	Iya Ketelo Roble	"	41	Same as above (wereda council executive member)
31	Guracha Abidiyu Mohammed	"	54	Unknown where killed
32	M/Husman Mohammed Sheik	"	56	Same as above
33	Ismael Mohammed Aliyu	"	25	Same as above
34	Hussen Hassen Edin?	"	27	Same as above
35	Yisak Aliyu Ahmed	"	55	Same as above
36	Abdirahman M/Hassen Abdu	"	50	Same as above
37	Aliyu Edin Sengar	"	23	Same as above
38	Edin Aliyu Bele	"	25	Same as above
39	Robow Mohammed Ibren	"	45	Same as above
40	Hussen Shiek Abdinur Haji	"	33	Same as above
41	Iray Hussen Shiek Abdi	"	7	Same as above
42	Eden Hussen Shiek Abdi	"	4	Same as above
43	Aliyu Ibren Hassen???	"	67	Same as above
44	Dayuhu Aliyu Menur	"	30	Same as above
45	Alnur Mohammed Jilo?	"	22	Same as above
46	Musluma Somo Mehad	Female	50	Shot and killed while sheltering for safety at the wereda council's office
47	Shelela Bidi Molu	"	80	Same as above
48	Mina Menur Ser	"	29	Same as above
49	Alima Swin Mohammed	"	23	Same as above
50	Abdiya Aliyo Yishak	"	2 mos.	Same as above
51	Fatuma Nurow Hassen	"	43	Same as above
52	Abiba Aliyo Ibren	"	9	Same as above
53	Alima Abdo Hassen?	"	6	Same as above
54	Alima Hassen Ali	"	66	Same as above
55	Abiba Mohammed Haji Ali	"	15	Same as above
56	Mariam Mohammed Hassen?	"	13	Same as above
57	Abshire Hassen Shebela	"	2	Same as above
58	Musluma Ibren Ali	"	80	Same as above
59	Asenay Mohammed Yisak	"	28	Same as above
60	Fatu Abdliban	"	20	Same as above
61	Amina Abdliban?	"	12	Same as above
62	Fiduma Boronje Aliyu	"	70	Same as above
63	Kuresh Abdulay	"	2	Same as above
64	Fatuma Aliyo Shiek Hassen	"	15	Same as above
65	Timira Beriyuhu Mohammed	"	15	Same as above
66	Neham Abdulay Aliyu	"	7	Same as above
67	Amina Mohammed Hassen	"	23	Same as above
68	Kediha Abdulay Mohammed	"	5	Same as above
69	Robiy Shilow	"	75	Same as above

70	Nuriya Ali Mohammed	"	40	Same as above
71	Imbiya Birkan Hassen	"	7	Two sisters set on fire in their home
72	Fatuma Birkan Hassen	"	4	

II. Wounded by Gunshot and Other Traditional Weapons

Table 3 below provides a list of the individuals who sustained various bodily injuries as a result of the conflict. The nature and seriousness of the injuries are described briefly. The injuries sustained by those individuals listed under number 29 through 33 were serious enough to necessitate their admission to the Army Hospital in Addis Ababa where they have been getting medical treatment until the time that this report was being prepared.

Table 3. Persons who sustained various bodily injuries

	Victim's full name	Brief description of injury
1	Ato Kulu Mohammed	A 27-year-old farmer was hit by a bullet on his right arm while in his house.
2	Child Abdnaser Yesuf	An 8-year-old child was stabbed on his shoulder, back and right hand.
3	Woizero Yere Issa	A 50-year-old and a mother of 6. She was hit by a bullet on the leg.
4	Child Abdiya Ado	A child of 4 was hit by a bullet while at home with her parents.
5	Child Aliyo Mohammed Yisak	A 5-year-old son of Woizero Alima Ketelo (see No. 16 in this Table) was hit by a bullet on the right thigh.
6	Yisak Geraw	A son of Woizero Halima Mohammed (see No. 11 in this Table) was hit by a bullet below the knee.?
7	Child Hassen Mohammed	A 9-year-old boy is the son of Ato Mohammed Haji (see Nos. 6 & 70 in Table 2) and Woizero Nuriya Ali. He was stabbed on the chin and back and his right hand has sustained fractures from beatings.
8	Woizero Musluma Shiek Alito	A 20-year-old mother of 2. She was hit by a bullet on the hip while trying to escape with her children. Her 4 and 7 year-old children were killed. (See Nos. 27 and 71 in Table 2 above)
9	Abdulahi Aliyo	A 4-year-old child who was wounded by a bullet on the left arm. He is now under medical treatment along with his grandmother, Woizero Halima Ahmed.
10	Child Abdiya Yisho	A 5-year-old child. Her father was killed and she was wounded by a bullet while with her mother.
11	Youth Hadija Aliyo	A young girl of 17 was wounded by a bullet on the left thigh and leg while at home.
12	Woizero Habiba Manisak	A 50-year-old mother of 5 children. She had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the right leg. One of her children was killed.
13	Woizero Halima Seid	A 56-year-old mother of 5. She had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the right thigh.
14	Yisak Ibrahim	A 20-year-old young man who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when he was hit by a bullet on both thighs.
15	Woizero Habiba Abdi	A 30-year-old mother of three who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the right hand. Her child of 7, Mohammed Hassen, was killed in front of her.
16	Woizero Alima Ketelo Eden	A 66-year-old elderly who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when he was hit by a bullet on the left leg.
17	Woizero Halima Mohammed	A 40-year-old mother of 5 who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the left thigh. On the same day, her two children were killed (see Nos. 6 of this Table), while two of her other children aged 13 and 10 (see Nos. 12 and 26) were killed.
18	Woizero Halima Ahmed	A 50-year-old mother of 5 who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the right knee. Her daughter, Woizero Alima Sowi was killed, while her child (see No 9 in this Table) was wounded.
19	Woizero Bisharey Ibren Kero	A 20-year-old mother of 2 who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection

		when she was hit by a bullet on the right knee. Her daughter (see No. 10 in this Table) was shot and wounded, while her husband (see No. 4 in Table 2) was killed.
20	Woizero Hajira Ubare	A 40-year-old mother of 6 who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the right thigh.
21	Woizero Habiba Hassen	A 22-year-old mother of 2 who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the back. She is receiving medical treatment while also nursing her 9-month-old child.
22	Youth Abdulahi Mohammed	An 18-year-old young man who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when he was hit by a bullet on both legs.
23	Woizero Habiba Ibrahim	A 40 year old mother of 4 who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the cheeks. Her husband and baby child were killed.
24	Child Momina Nishow	A 12 year old girl who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the leg. Her father was killed, while her mother was wounded.
25	Youth Abdiya Munir	A 15 year old girl who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the left hand and right knee. Her mother was killed.
26	Child Zara Hussen	A 12 year old girl who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the right foot.
27	Youth Aliyo Mohammed	A 15-year-old young man who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when he was hit by a bullet on the left knee.
28	Ato Abdi Mohammed	A young man of 22 who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office, along with his family, looking for protection when he was hit by a bullet on the left hand. Both of his parents were killed.
29	Ato Aliyo Ibren	An elderly man of 60 and father of 13 children. He had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when he was hit by a bullet on both legs. Because of the seriousness of his injury he has been hospitalised at the Army Hospital in Addis Ababa.
30	Youth Aliyo Mohammed	A young man of 19 had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when he was hit by a bullet on the right leg. He is undergoing treatment at the Army Hospital in Addis Ababa.
31	Child Yisak Ibren	A child of 10 who had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when he was hit by a bullet on both legs, both hands and the chest. One of his legs had to be amputated. At present, he is undergoing treatment at the Army Hospital in Addis Ababa.

Table 3. Persons who sustained various bodily injuries (cont'd)

	Victim's full name	<i>Brief description of injury</i>
32	Woizero Awliya Yisak	A young woman of 21 and a mother of 2. She had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the left leg for which she is undergoing treatment at the Army Hospital in Addis Ababa.
33	Woizero Habiba Mohammed Ibren	A young woman of 28 and a mother of 3. She had gone to the Arero Wereda Council's office looking for protection when she was hit by a bullet on the chest for which she is now undergoing treatment at the Army Hospital in Addis Ababa.

Conclusion

As pointed out in the introduction of this report, EHRCO has issued several reports regarding the human rights violations resulting from the ethnic-based governance. On the bases of information verified by EHRCO, these reports have shown that as a result of ethnic conflicts many lives were lost, many others physically handicapped, thousands displaced and families dispersed, and considerable private and public property destroyed. Since it is the duty of government to safeguard the welfare and well being of citizens, it should take appropriate and immediate measures in dealing with this urgent and dangerous problem. To date, the party in power has not taken the

necessary and appropriate action. Indeed, it has also tended to cover up these conflicts and their ugly consequences, making it appear a willing participant, direct or indirect, in the conflicts.

Among the main reasons that led EHRCO to this conclusion are the following:

- *In the actions they have taken or in their inaction, local government officials and armed security officers have been playing leading roles in the ethnic conflicts that have occurred so far.*
- *The federal government, on its part, has failed to attend to and resolve the ethnic conflicts occurring in various regions of the country, thereby ignoring the responsibility entrusted to it by Article 48 (1) of the Constitution which states, "All border disputes shall be settled by agreement of the concerned States. Where the concerned States fail to reach agreement, the House of the Federation shall decide such disputes on the basis of settlement patterns and the wishes of the peoples concerned."*
- *The failure of the government to bring to justice those officials and armed security officers that are directly or indirectly responsible for instigating and fanning the ethnic conflicts.*
- *The failure of the responsible authorities to compensate and rehabilitate the victims of these ethnic conflicts.*

Consequently, EHRCO once again calls upon the government to take an urgent and appropriate action to deal with earlier as well as current ethnic conflicts in accordance with the country's laws. EHRCO also urges all individuals, organisations and all those committed to peace, democracy and the rule of law to write to the government officials and institutions listed below supporting its appeals in this regard.

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 Minsiter 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.

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2[1] As it was not possible to obtain the names of the three family members of Ato Yishak Ali Kula, they could not be included in the Table.