

# **49<sup>th</sup> Special Report**

## **A Conflict That Resulted in Many Deaths in Tepi, Shekicho Zone**

**2 May 2002**

### **Introduction**

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) had appealed to all concerned that “Because government officials at various levels of responsibility failed to make timely attempts to resolve, through peaceful and just means, conflicts that arise between different ethnic groups, their belated efforts to intervene through the use of force after the conflicts started unfolding have often ended up in further compounding the situation. More often than not, this has resulted in disturbing the peace and well-being of the people”. However, EHRCO’s repeated call fell on deaf ears and ethnic conflicts have become more frequent. Recently, following their demand for the respect of their constitutional right to decide on their own affairs and administer themselves, a great deal of destruction to both human life and property has occurred among the Sheko-Mezengir in Tepi Town, Yeki Wereda, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNP). The details of these destructions are presented as follows:

Clash between the Sheko-Mezengir and Government Security Forces in Yeki Wereda,

Tepi Town

### **Causes of the Clash**

Among the many ethnic groups living in Yeki Wereda, Shekicho Zone, are the Sheko Mezengir and Menja.

Beginning from 1992, members of the Shekicho ethnic group who had organized themselves under the Shekicho Peoples’ Democratic Movement (SPDM) and become supporters of the ruling party have been administering Yeki Wereda. Objecting to this, the Sheko and Mezengir ethnic groups demanded that the Sheko and Mezengir pull out of the Shekicho Zone, and that Yeki Wereda be included in Gambella Administrative Region. In a referendum held in 1993, it was agreed that Shekicho Zone would remain in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Administrative Region (SNNP) and Yeki Wereda too would continue within Shekicho Zone.

Yeki Wereda’s 120,000 population is a mixture of Sheka, Mezengir, Menja, Amhara, Oromo, Kefa, Agew, Menit, Tigre, and Bench peoples. It is believed that most of these ethnic groups participated in the 1993 referendum when it was decided that the regional status of both Shekicho Zone and Yeki Wereda would remain unchanged. Members of the Sheko Mezengir ethnic groups who were dissatisfied with this decision raised the issue once more through their Sheko-Mezengir Peoples Democratic Unity Organisation (SMPDUO), which they established in 2001. However, all officials from the regional to the Wereda government told them that their demand was inappropriate. The problem, which had been simmering since 1993, resulted in the following destructions on 10 March 2002:

## How the March 10 Clash Started

On 10 March 2002, some 300 members of the Sheko-Mezengir ethnic groups left their peasant associations with spears, machete (gejera), and some modern arms and blocked the Tepi-Jimma road with the intention of stopping traffic. Since they had also surrounded the Tepi Coffee Plantation, clashes ensued and lives were lost. Then proceeding to Tepi Town, they surrounded the Yeki Wereda Council and demanded that those Council members who had allegedly blocked their earlier demands give themselves up. They promised to bring these council members before a court of law. At this, clashes occurred between the Police and the Sheko-Mezengir members who had surrounded the Council. Additional special police from Mizan and soldiers from Gambella arrived at the site and took forceful measures. This resulted in heavy damages to both human life and property. EHRCO presents in the tables below a summary of the damages it was able to verify so far. According to information reaching EHRCO, however, the destructions caused by these conflicts are much more serious than presented here in this report.

Table 1. Summary of Damages Caused

No.	Type of Damages	Magnitude of Damages
1	Damages Caused to Humans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Killed</li> <li>• Physically injured</li> <li>• Detained</li> <li>• Displaced</li> </ul>	24 6 25 4738
2	Houses set on fire	1,177

Table 2. Details of the Damages

### 2.1. Killed by Soldiers

No.	Name of deceased	Date killed	Address	Remarks
1	Abi Endre	14/3/20002	Qerche Peasant Association	Aged 50 and father of 5. Killed as he was trying to escape. Member of the Amhara ethnic group.
2	Sheikh Abdu Musa	>>	>>	Aged 80 and father of 12. Killed as he was trying to escape. Member of the Gurage ethnic group.
3	Besken Kopibay	16/3/2002	Nupa Peasant Association	An elderly member of the Sheko ethnic group.
4	Kassahun G/Selassie	>>	>>	An elderly member of the Kefa ethnic group.
5	Kebede Birega	11/3/2002	>>	Chairman of Sheko Peasant Association.
6	Berhanu Kerbabi	>>	>>	Member of the Sheko ethnic group.
7	Atrse Atemo	15/3/2002	>>	Member of the Bench ethnic group.
8	Yirga Zuta	>>	>>	Member of the Sheko ethnic group.

9	Wondimu Kassa	>>	>>	>>
10	Demisse Begele	>>	>>	Member of the Kefa ethnic group.
11	Mege Zerab	>>	>>	An elderly member of the Sheko ethnic group.
12	Abebe Eshetu	>>	>>	Member of the Oromo ethnic group.
13	Paulos Neken	>>	>>	Member of the Sheko ethnic group.
14	Amanuel Wege	>>	>>	>>
15	Arega Keda	>>	>>	>>
16	Yaw Dayke	>>	>>	>>
17	Meles Mekuria	>>	>>	Member of the Oromo ethnic group.
18	Habtamu Asrat	>>	>>	Member of the Kefa ethnic group.
19	Dosha Zota	>>	>>	Member of the Sheko ethnic group.
20	Terefe Deku	>>	>>	>>

## 2.2. Security/Police Killed during the Clash

No.	Name of deceased	Date killed	Remarks
1	Corporal Geta Messay	11 3 2002	Member of Tepi Police Force who was killed during the shoot out with the Mezengir.
2	Private Moges Yakob	>>	>>
3	>> Wondimu Ertro	>>	>>
4	>> Tsegaye Dadigeba	>>	>>

**Table 3. Wounded by Gunshot or Other Weapons and Undergoing Medical Treatment at Metu Hospital**

No.	Name of wounded	Remarks
1	Tariku Faro	A 32-year old employee of the Ministry of Agriculture and a member of the Sheko ethnic group. On 12 March 2002 at about 10:00 in the evening, he was shot and wounded on the right leg below the knee by a security officer.
2	Yimam Tessema	An Amhara; on 13 March 2002 at about 9:00 in the morning, he was shot and wounded on the right thigh and shoulder by armed security officers.
3	Haile Belette	A resident of Tepi and a 15-year old orphan. On 12 March 2002 at about 2:00 in the afternoon, he was shot and wounded on the left thigh by a stray bullet. He is a member of the Sheko ethnic group.
4	Bizunesh Damesa (Female)	A 60-year old Amhara and a mother of 5 children. On 11 March 2002 at about 11:00 in the morning, she was shot and wounded on the left thigh and right hand while she was in her house. Because she did not have enough money for medical treatment, she is in a serious condition.
5	Gorin Edaqrma (Female)	Frightened by the clash, she leaves her house in Genu Peasant Association and hides in the plantation nearby when her house caught fire. Her 7-year old daughter, <b>Tihut Tsegaye</b> , died from the fire. Seeing this, the mother came out of her hiding shouting when members of the Gofa ethnic group attacked her with spear and machete (gejera) on the right thigh, right shoulder, head, and around her sexual organ. As a result of her

		daughter's death by fire, she remains mentally deranged until now.
6	Assefa Firisa	Head of Tepi Municipality. Shot and wounded on the right thigh on 11 May 2002 at about 2:00 p.m.:

Table 4. Founding & Central Committee Members of Sheko-Mezengir Peoples Democratic Unity Organisation (SMPDUO) Detained Since 13 March 2002 on Suspicion of Inciting the Clash

***A) Bench-Maji Zone Police Station***

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No.	Name	Responsibility
1	Elias Tani	Central Committee Member
2	Wossene Jerka	Central Committee Member & Deputy Chair of Sheko Wereda
3	Solomon Gonder	Central Committee Member
4	Kassahun Jerka	Won in the December 30 election as SMPDUO candidate & was since 8 February 2002 administrator of Sheka Wereda.
5	Banku Yerusa	Deputy Administrator
6	Yohannes Yanu	Cabinet Member
7	Alemayehu Tekalign	>>
8	Messeret Wegese	>>
9	Tigrew Basha	Member
10	Endrias Bedi	>>
11	Paulos Gumiye	>>
12	Elias T'ingo	>>
13	Solomon Gamorsa	>>
14	Paulos Marqos	>>
15	Teretu Mikira	>>
16	Belay Desalegh	Chairman of Geez Meret Peasant Association
17	Getnet Yazbachew	Member

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**B) Detained in Sheko Wereda Police Station as of 12 March 2002**

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No.	Detainee's Name	Responsibility
18	Zinki Debebe	SMPDUO Member
19	Dawit Daniel	>> >>
20	Kifle Tafesse	>> >>
21	Tafesse Anbesse	>> >>
22	Zina Noya	>> >>
23	Habtam Banku	>> >>
24	Wodajo Mirkiyab	>> >>
25	Birega Sibisa	>> >>

The above detainees are members of the opposition political organization, SMPDUO, which was established in 2001. Since their detention they have not been brought before a court of law. They are also not provided with food. Since the Sheko Wereda Administrator, No. 4 in the list, has been detained, the administrative affairs of the Wereda have been disrupted and the people of the Wereda are faced with serious problems for lack of any one to attend to their day-to-day administrative needs.

Qebeles Where Houses Were Burnt Down Because of the Clash

Tsanu (settlement station), Darimo, Qura, Bech'i, Komi, Beqo, Machi, Hibret Fire, Depi, Selam Ber, Tepi 02 Qebele, and Addis Berhan Peasant Association.

While the total number of houses known to have been destroyed by fire is **1,177**, information gathered by EHRCO indicate that there are others that have not been verified.

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Table 5. Number of People Displaced by the Conflict

No.	Peasant Association	Number of People
1	Tsanu	1792
2	Endrias	1700
3	Depi	100
4	Darimo	200
5	Fide	100
6	Hibret Fire	350
7	Beqo	200
8	Michi	100
9	Selam Ber	100
10	Bech'i	96
	Total	4738

EHRCO has repeatedly reported to the concerned government authorities that many lives have been lost, bodies maimed, thousands of old men and women as well as children have remained displaced, lots of private and public property destroyed, and the peace and security of the people threatened by ethnic conflicts.

As shown in this report, the actions taken by government security forces beginning from 10 March 2002 under the pretext of stopping the actions of the Sheko-Mezengir ethnic groups in SNNP Administrative Region have resulted in a great deal of destruction to human life and property. The problem is related to the one that had arisen in 1993 and the present destructions are the outcome of the failure to take timely and peaceful steps to resolve the differences.

Consequently, EHRCO calls upon the Government to investigate the basic causes of the ethnic conflict with the view of

- ***Taking just and transparent steps to resolve misunderstandings regarding regional boundaries in accordance with Article 48 (1), which provides for the resolution of such disputes on the bases of population settlement and the wishes of the people;***
- ***Bringing before the law those individuals and government officials and armed security personnel responsible for the lives lost and private and public property destroyed during the conflict; and***
- ***Ensuring that victims of the conflict are appropriately compensated and that the displaced are resettled and rehabilitated.***

EHRCO also appeals to all individuals and organizations committed to the rule of law and the respect of human rights to write to the following government officials and bodies supporting EHRCO's demands:

**Copy to:**

- The Council of Peoples Representatives, P.O.Box 80001; Fax No. (251-1) 550900; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- The Federal Council, P.O.Box 80001; Fax No. (251-1) 550722, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Lt. Girma W/Giorgis, FDRE President, P.O. Box 1031; Fax No. (251-1), 552020 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Mr. Meles Zenawi, FDRE Prime Minister, P.O.Box 1031; Fax No. (251-1), 552020 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Mr. Harqo Haroye, P.O.Box 1031; Fax No. (251-1), 552020 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Oromiya Council, P.O.Box 101769; Fax No. 513642; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Council, P.O.Box 18; Fax No. (251-6) 201950; Awasa, Ethiopia.
- Gambella Peoples' Regional Council

P. O. Box 25; Fax: (251-1) 510277; Gambella, Ethiopia