

Amhara Ethnic Violence in Ethiopia's Oromia Region Shows Hallmark Signs of Ethnic Cleansing, Says MRG

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Abstract: *The objective of this article is to explore the prevalence of ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia. Through the use of qualitative research methods and empirical data such as published documents, letters, and reports compiled by human rights defenders and organizations, the article shows how the ruling class categorizes a certain group of people (Amharic language speakers) as an enemy and attempts to eliminate them from the area they inhabit. Amharic language speakers living as a minority group in other regional states are persecuted or endangered. The frequent occurrence of ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia has been attributable to the nature of the government's policy of ethnic federalism and the relentless desire of the ruling class to downgrade Amharic language speakers who are considered by the government to have been former rulers. The term "Amhara" is derived from amari, meaning "one who is pleasing, agreeable, beautiful, and gracious." Amhara culture is often identified with Abyssinian culture, which is regarded as the heir to the cultural blending of ancient Semitic and Cushitic (African) patterns; other heirs are the Tigre-speaking people of Some suggest their origin to be modern-day Yemen (Sheba and Himyar), the Kingdom of Aksum and relocated to (Amhara) Sayint, now known Wollo (named after an oromo clan that migrated to the area in the 16-17th century), a place that was known as the Amhara region in the past.*



Minority Rights Group International (MRG) unequivocally condemns the recent violence, harassment, and intimidation against minorities in Ethiopia's Oromia region, which show disturbing hallmark signs of ethnic cleansing.

Reports to MRG as well as media coverage show that following the tragic [murder](#) of Hachalu Hundessa, a renowned Oromo singer and activist, an organised and large group of predominantly young people from the Oromo community killed members of ethnic minorities in the region and burned down hotels, schools, business centres and residential homes belonging to ethnic Amharas and Gurage people, though the properties of Christian Oromos were also damaged.

The Oromo are Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, making up an estimate 35 per cent of the population, while the Amhara are the second largest ethnic group in the country. Jointly, the two communities account for an estimated 60 per cent of the population. The Oromo have themselves long faced marginalisation and exclusion at the hands of the central government; in this instance, those targeted have largely comprised members of other ethnic groups which constitute minorities in Oromia region.

The extremely disturbing tactics that were used in these attacks and that indicate signs of ethnic cleansing include:

1. The attacks were premeditated

Attackers carried a list with the names of individuals and households to target. The group were going home-to-home checking identity cards, specifically targeting Amhara and Gurages (who make up an estimated 3 per cent of the population). Accounts indicate that many of the attackers were not from the areas, suggesting that transportation had been arranged to go from town to town.

2. Federal and local government officials turned a blind eye

In many areas of Oromia region, the federal and regional government was not willing to deploy security forces in time to protect minorities. In one case in Dera town, a father was murdered in front of his son, who himself sustained serious injury in the attack. Moments before his father's death, his son called law enforcement personnel for support, but they responded by saying they were not authorised to intervene. Instead, reports indicate that when victims tried to defend themselves, Oromia region Special Forces attacked them.

3. Media outlets allowed hate speech and incitement of violence to air

Media outlets were actively propagating the attacks live and giving guidance to the attackers. Oromo Media Network (OMN) operating from Minnesota, USA, broadcasted a series of inflammatory hate-filled messages, including calls to lock and burn the homes of Amhara people.

4. The hate-driven nature of the killings and violence

The murders of ethnic Amharas and Gurages were celebrated by attackers, with reports indicating that victims' bodies were displayed in the streets.

Now that Ethiopia's internet blackout has ended, MRG will continue to investigate and research the situation. However, given the existing reports of these atrocious acts, MRG:

1. Calls on the Ethiopian government to immediately provide protection and humanitarian assistance to the thousands of people who have lost their properties and have been displaced from their homes, many of whom are now at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.
2. Calls on the Ethiopian government to conduct an independent and transparent enquiry into the atrocities committed in Oromia region, bring the perpetrators to justice and embark on institutional and legal reforms that ensure the safety and security of all minorities in Ethiopia.
3. Urges the US authorities to intervene to halt the hate speech propagated by US-based Oromo Media Network, which broadcasts messages that incite violence against ethnic Amhara, Gurages and other non-Oromo minority groups in the region.

4. Urges social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter to be on the alert for hate speech against minorities in Ethiopia and quickly take down harmful content that encourages inter-ethnic hatred and violence.
5. Urges the United Nations to carry out a full investigation into the violence, including root causes and report with recommendations concerning how political and social institutions inclusive of Ethiopia's diverse society can be built and supported.
6. Urges all countries that have contributed to the training of Ethiopia's law enforcement personnel to review training methods and content to understand how law enforcement personnel (in some cases) took decisions to not intervene in what appears to have been widespread ethnic cleansing