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Detention without charge of Amharas must end, and journalism must not be prosecuted as terrorism

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Ethiopia's human rights commission reports that unlawful detentions "have persisted" in conflict-affected parts of Amhara. The Board calls for every detainee to be charged before a court or released, and for an end to terrorism prosecutions for reporting.

In its annual report for June 2025 to June 2026, presented on 9 October, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) found that unlawful detentions "have persisted" in conflict-affected parts of Amhara. It described a "widespread practice" of detentions in Amhara on grounds of "current affairs" or accusations of being "Fano cells", and it documented complaints of enforced disappearance in Amhara, South Ethiopia and Oromia [1]. No emergency excuses these detentions. The state of emergency declared in August 2023 suspended judicial review; OHCHR found arrests under it "predominantly of ethnic Amhara people in different parts of the country" [3]. It expired in June 2024, but mass arrests continued [4], and in January 2025 Amnesty International reported thousands held for months without charge or trial [5]. In May 2026 the EHRC reported arrests without court orders in police stations in Amhara, as well as suspects not brought before a court within 48 hours and families denied visits [2]. When more than 600 federal prisoners were released in September, 28 detainees on the same charges stayed in custody because they had not submitted pardon applications [6]. Five journalists have been held since 2023 on terrorism charges over their reporting on the Amhara conflict: Gobeze Sisay, Meskerem Abera, Genet Asmamaw, Dawit Begashaw and Abay Zewdu. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, they face life imprisonment or the death penalty if convicted. CPJ reports that they were pressured to sign letters taking responsibility for the crisis and "promising to stop working as journalists", and that all five refused. Their lawyer told CPJ that prison officials "separated them from other prisoners to compel them to write their own versions of a draft document" [7]. CPJ reported on 13 August that Abay Zewdu's next hearing was set for 16 October and the other four's defence hearing for 19 November [7]. [UPDATE AFTER 16 OCT HEARING] Reporting on an armed conflict is not terrorism. Fano is not a designated terrorist organization [8], and covering its war with federal forces is journalism. We call on the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Amhara regional government to: Bring every person detained in connection with the Amhara conflict promptly before a court, and charge them with a recognizable offence or release them. Give families, lawyers and the EHRC access to every detainee and every place of detention, and tell families where their relatives are held. Investigate the enforced-disappearance complaints the EHRC has received, and disclose the fate and whereabouts of the people concerned. Stop using terrorism charges against journalists for their reporting, and release the five journalists named here unless they are promptly charged before a court with a recognizable criminal offence. Make no release conditional on signing a statement of guilt. The EHRC's report also records abductions for ransom by armed groups and organized robbery groups [1]. We call on Fano forces and every other armed group to end them and to release those they

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hold. People seeking help for a detained relative can find organizations that accept reports on our Report an Incident page. The Board Sources EHRC, Executive Summary: Annual Ethiopia Human Rights Situation Report, June 2025 to June 2026 (English; released 9 Oct 2026; PDF via the download button). Press coverage: The Reporter, 10 Oct 2026, https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/53373/. Evidence: Confirmed. EHRC, Amhara: discussion on the protection of the human rights of suspects in police custody, 13 May 2026. Evidence: Confirmed. OHCHR, Update on the Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia in 2023 (June 2024). Evidence: Confirmed. HRW, World Report 2025: Ethiopia (state of emergency expired June 2024; mass arrests persisted). Evidence: Confirmed. Amnesty International (Amnesty UK mirror), thousands remain locked up in Amhara, 28 Jan 2025. Evidence: Confirmed. The Reporter, 600+ federal prisoners released; 28 who declined pardon applications held, 12 Sep 2026. Evidence: Confirmed (one outlet relaying EHRC). CPJ, 'In Ethiopia, 5 journalists pressured to apologize for terrorism to win release', 13 Aug 2026. Evidence: Confirmed. House of Peoples' Representatives designation of TPLF and 'Shene' (OLF-Shene), 6 May 2021 (Embassy of Ethiopia release); TPLF delisting, 22 Mar 2023 (Al Jazeera: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/22/update-1-ethiopia-removes-terrorist-designation-from-dominant-tigray-party Evidence: Confirmed (designations and delisting); no Fano designation found.

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