



OROMO LEGACY LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY ASSOCIATION

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POLICY PAPER

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S APPROACH TO ETHIOPIA



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ABOUT OLLAA



OROMO LEGACY LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY ASSOCIATION

Since 2016, OLLAA has worked as a force for human rights, women's rights, and indigenous rights by empowering Oromo communities and collaborating across the globe. As an umbrella organization, we represent over 50 Oromo communities throughout the world and frequently work in coalition with other advocacy organizations that represent various ethnic groups across Ethiopia.

ABSTRACT

The ongoing and growing conflicts throughout Ethiopia are threatening to destabilize the entire Horn of Africa. The international community must intervene with a measured response, empowering and including all ethnic groups in the process. This paper outlines how the international community, namely the United States, Australia, the European Union, the United Nations, and the African Union should prioritize the myriad of policy options available to them. Specifically, the Oromo Legacy Leadership and Advocacy

Association (OLLAA) urges diplomats to first perform a cross-country analysis of human rights violations to gain a better understanding of the current Ethiopian landscape. OLLAA urges the international community to next utilize the diplomatic tools at their disposal to encourage the Ethiopian government to protect human rights, prioritize the flow of humanitarian assistance to all who need it across the country, and lay the groundwork for lasting peace through a truly inclusive transitional justice process.



INTRODUCTION

The Oromo people are concentrated in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, but also constitute a vital part of the population in Kenya. Despite the fact that the Oromo play a significant role in the stability of the entire Horn of Africa, violence and abuses perpetrated against the Oromo continue to this day. The world is aware of the violence in Tigray, but the brutality against other ethnic groups, such as the Oromo, Kimant, and Gumuz, has not been reported on or highlighted to the same extent.

The international community has a responsibility to take immediate action, not only to curb the violence but also to provide humanitarian assistance to all individuals in need throughout Ethiopia.

This paper will first explore the history of Ethiopia, including the recent history of the Oromo. It will then discuss various countries and international organizations' current policies towards Ethiopia and investigate and recommend alternative policy approaches that can be utilized to encourage the Ethiopian government to protect the human rights of its civilians and ensure the provision of humanitarian aid to all in need.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Ethiopia's rich history is both beautiful and wrought with conflict. Ethiopians have long fought for equality, freedom, and their right to self-determination. Despite persecution, dictatorship, tyranny, famine, drought, and attempted invasions, Ethiopia remains the only African country to have never been successfully colonized by European forces.

The international community has long viewed Ethiopia as an African power with unfailing devotion and dedication to self-determination. However, while Ethiopia as a country has not been formally colonized by a European power, multiple ethnic groups within Ethiopia—specifically, the Oromo and other southern nations, such as Sidama, Somali, and Gumuz—feel they were effectively colonized through the brutal tactics utilized by the Amhara, who enforced their imperial regime through political, social, and economic oppression, as well as ethnic cleansing.

When Emperor Menelik II came to power in 1889, he adopted an aggressive expansionist policy that was functionally similar to European colonization within the continent, and eventually formed the country known as “Ethiopia” at

the beginning of the 20th century. The ethnic groups that were conquered during Menelik's campaign were viewed as “backward”, and the new Ethiopian leaders, therefore, “legitimized colonization with a ‘civilizing’ objective”.

Haile Selassie further entrenched the Amharized state structure and culture by introducing a new Constitution which made Amharic the only official language of Ethiopia and by explicitly encouraging acculturation [1].

Throughout its history, each group in power has continued to utilize repressive policies against various groups, and with the exception of the Ahmara, most ethnic groups have experienced systematic exclusion from political processes and economic opportunities [2].



DEMOGRAPHICS

There are over 80 different ethnic groups and tribes in Ethiopia, although the Oromo comprise the majority of Ethiopia's total population, outnumbering the second-largest ethnic group by almost 200 percent. [3] While it is widely agreed that the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in the country, it is difficult to find consensus on what portion of the population they make up. Estimates range from 35.8% [4] - 55% of the total population. [5]

Similar to its diversity in ethnicity, Ethiopia is also extremely diverse in terms of religious practice.

Roughly half of the country's population is Christian and many denominations are represented, such as Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants. The other half of Ethiopians practice the Muslim faith. An unknown number of Oromos practice Waaqeffannaa (the indigenous Oromo faith).

Notably, despite their large numbers and access to natural resources in Oromia, the Oromos' rich history has been largely ignored and minimized, skewing Ethiopian history in favor of narratives focusing on the north, in particular, the Amhara. [6]



THE OROMO

The Oromo are one of the largest African indigenous ethnic groups, with a population of over 50 million in Ethiopia alone, where they are predominantly located in its central, eastern, western, and southern regions. The majority of Oromo live in the Oromia region, which is also Ethiopia's most ethnically diverse region and includes between 5 to 7 million non-Oromos. Oromia is home to the Ethiopian and Oromia capital city of Addis Ababa. Addis Ababa is not only an integral part of Oromia but it is also stipulated in Ethiopian Constitution that Oromia has a special interest over the city. [7] The Oromo people are religiously diverse, following the traditional indigenous Waaqeffannaa religion, as well as Christianity and Islam.

However, despite their size and

influence, there is a lack of scholarship and study of the Oromo people, which makes it extremely difficult to know the full extent of the oppression they have experienced and creates a “distortion of the [Oromo] achievements.” [8] As noted by

Dr. Brian Yates in his book *The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia*, “the Oromo people are just completely integral to Ethiopian society. It’s similar to how many American groups have been written out of American history. In a lot of ways, there are parallels between Oromo and black Americans. Both are essential to their countries. There isn’t an America without people of color; there isn’t an Ethiopia without the Oromo.” [8]



THE DIASPORA

Following a 1974 uprising, Ethiopia's imperial government was overthrown and the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia (DERG or Dergue) was established. DERG murdered more than 60 sitting cabinet members and massacred thousands of political and national movement leaders in their campaign of "Red Terror" (1977-1979). During this time, thousands of refugees, including Oromos, fled the country, forming vibrant diaspora communities that continue today. [9]

The Ethiopian diaspora encompasses millions of displaced Ethiopians of many ethnicities and backgrounds. [10] In 2014, over 250,000 Ethiopian-born people were living in the US. [11] A 2020 report on Ethiopian displacements puts the international number at over 3 million, the majority of whom left the country due to ethnic violence. [12] These diaspora communities should be key resources for policymakers regarding Ethiopian politics and the democratization of the country.



**"THE OROMO
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RECENT POLITICAL HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA FOR THE OROMO

In 2018, the Oromo youth (qeerroo) were at the forefront of the non-violent campaign to push for democratic change in Ethiopia following decades of oppression by EPRDF led by TPLF. During this period, tens of thousands of protesters (the majority of whom were Oromo) were killed and detained under Ethiopia's anti-terrorism law. [13] As a result of these protests, in 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power. When he came into office, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sought forgiveness by condemning these detentions, releasing over 30,000 political prisoners, and claiming that Ethiopia had committed "terrorist acts" against its citizens. [14] The Oromo, much like the international community, initially welcomed the new Prime Minister and believed he would protect human rights and democratize the country.

Unfortunately, despite Prime Minister Abiy's purported commitment to human rights, his regime has continued to perpetrate abuses against the Oromo. In late-2018, Ethiopia declared a de facto state of emergency in Oromia and installed military command posts in western and southern Oromia. Since then, there have been

credible reports of human rights abuses committed by Ethiopian security forces associated with these command posts against civilians, including extrajudicial executions, torture, and arbitrary arrests and detentions. [15]

In June 2020, the Oromo singer and activist Hachalu Hundesa was assassinated. [16] Despite calls from within Ethiopia and human rights organizations, [17] the government failed to establish an independent inquiry into his death. [18] Instead, the government imposed a three-week internet shutdown in an attempt to quell dissent. [19] In the protests that followed, official figures reported that at least 240 people in the Oromia region were killed by government authorities, while numerous others were injured, [20] although the true number is likely much higher. Official reports by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission found that more than 9,000 people were arrested in the months following the protests. [21] Many of those arrested during the protests included human rights activists, journalists, and political opposition leaders.

In November 2020, the war in Tigray and northern Ethiopia broke out, leading to reports of

RECENT POLITICAL HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA FOR THE OROMO CONT.

widespread atrocities [22] and a de facto blockade on the delivery of humanitarian aid to the region. [23] The US government has “described the conflict as ethnic cleansing against Tigrayans” with reports of “rape and sexual violence against women and girls” perpetrated by troops and members of the militia. [24] Since that time, much of the world’s focus has been drawn to the crisis in northern Ethiopia, even as the situation inside Oromia and across southern Ethiopia continued to worsen.

Throughout 2021-2022, there were reports of attacks on Oromo civilians inside Oromia and in the Wollo Oromia Special zone of the Amhara region, perpetrated by numerous actors, including Ethiopian National Defense Forces, Oromia and Amhara regional security forces, and others. The first major reports of violence occurred in the Wollo Oromia Special zone of the Amhara region in March-April 2021, where a series of clashes led to the death of countless civilians, and only ended after the Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency in the Amhara region. [25] Shortly after this conflict ended, in May 2021, the Ethiopian government designated both the TPLF and the OLA as

terrorist organizations. [26]

In the fall of 2021, the OLA and TPLF entered into a formal military alliance. [27] In October 2021, the TPLF and OLA announced they had captured three strategic cities in the Amhara region in their advance toward Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa. [28] There were reports of airstrikes in these areas, leading to the deaths of 88 civilians, [29] as well as attacks launched against Oromo civilians, [30] which, according to reports, did not end after the TPLF decided to withdraw from the Amhara region on December 20, 2021. A few months later, it was reported that thousands of Oromo civilians had been arbitrarily detained and hundreds were extrajudicially executed by Ethiopian security forces since the TPLF withdrew from the zone. [31]

In November 2021, Ethiopia declared a nationwide state of emergency for six months in response to the conflict in Tigray. [32] This state of emergency granted broad powers to the Ethiopian government, including authorizing the arrest of any person suspected of being connected to the OLA and TPLF without a warrant and allowing them to be detained for as long as

RECENT POLITICAL HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA FOR THE OROMO CONT.

the proclamation was in force. [33] Although Oromos had long-faced arbitrary arrests and detention before this pronouncement, countless Oromos were arrested under the auspices of this declaration, including prominent lawyers, judges, journalists, and political analysts, [34] and ordinary civilians who were targeted on the basis of their ethnicity. [35]

In April 2022, the Ethiopian federal and Oromia regional governments announced the launch of a military operation inside Oromia designed to eliminate the OLA. [36] Following that announcement, there were reports of Ethiopian security forces perpetrating violent attacks against Oromo civilians, including drone strikes in the West Shewa [37] and East Wollega zones. As in previous operations, these attacks included extrajudicial executions, [38] arbitrary arrests and detentions, and the destruction of houses. In mid-April, UN OCHA reported that 500,000 people had been displaced inside Western Oromia alone due to “intensified hostilities and inter-communal violence.” [40]

In August 2022, renewed fighting in northern Ethiopia ended a five-

month ceasefire between the government and TPLF, with both sides accusing the other of instigating the violence. [41] In November 2022, the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan forces signed a peace agreement to formally end hostilities between the two parties. [42] Although it remains to be seen if this peace will hold, the international community has welcomed this announcement and viewed it as a necessary step towards achieving lasting peace in the country.

Unfortunately for the Oromo, the situation inside Oromia continued to worsen during the latter half of 2022, especially after the signing of the peace agreement. Since that time, there have been increased reports of drone strikes—particularly in the West Shewa, East Shewa, East Wollega, and West Wollega zones of Oromia—that have led to the death of countless civilians. [43] In one of these attacks, which took place on November 2, 2022, a witness reported that dozens of people had died and hundreds were injured in Bila, West Wollega [44] zone. Oromo civilians have also continued to face routine arbitrary arrests and detentions, [45] either for their decision to exercise their right to protest or for purported connections to the

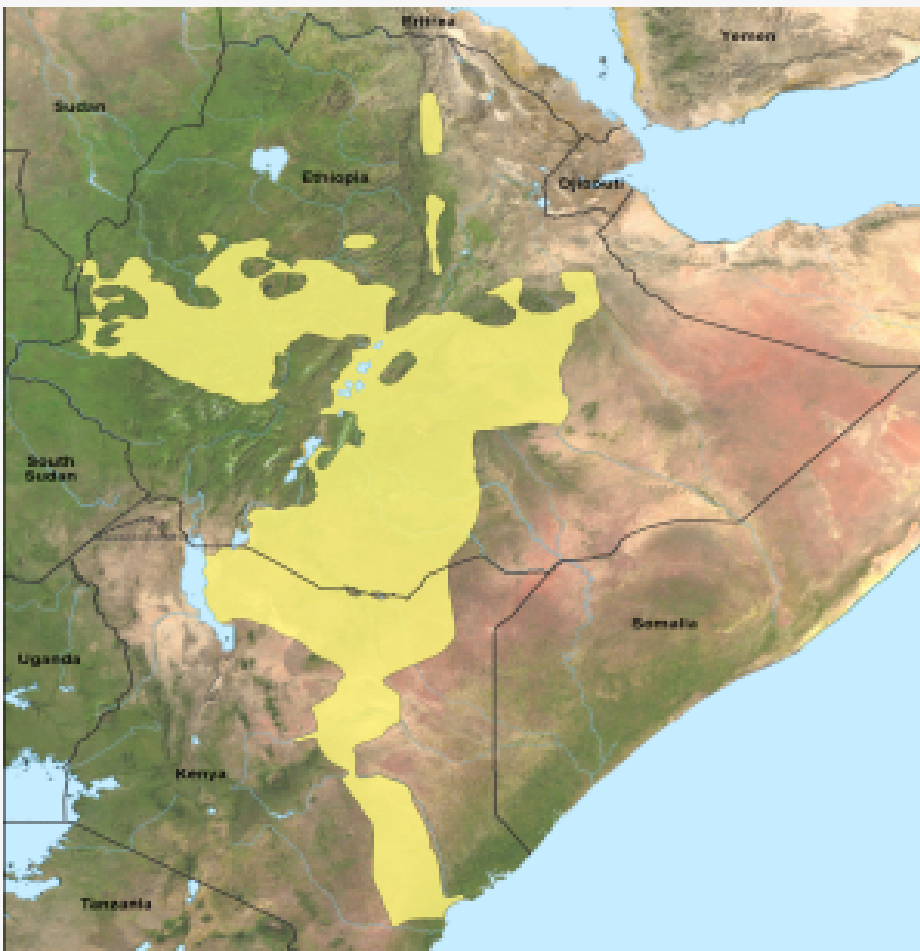
RECENT POLITICAL HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA FOR THE OROMO CONT.

OLA. Those who are arrested frequently face further human rights violations. [46] Amhara militias (fano) have also greatly increased their attacks on civilian populations throughout western and central Oromia, leading to deaths and mass displacement. [47]

Finally, it is important to note that the Horn of Africa is currently experiencing a severe drought which has led to increasing food insecurity and mass internal

displacement. [48] The Oromia region, which has been impacted by both drought and conflict, is in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. In December 2022, USAID reported that 5 million people inside Oromia are in need of emergency food assistance. [49]

This drought, particularly when coupled with the increasing insecurity inside Oromia, may well lead to the destabilization of the entire region.



THE DISTRIBUTION OF INDIGENOUS OROMO POPULATIONS ACROSS ETHIOPIA AND KENYA.

CURRENT POLICIES TOWARDS ETHIOPIA

For the purposes of this paper, United States and Australian policies towards Ethiopia are explored, as well as intergovernmental approaches adopted in response to the conflicts in Ethiopia at the European Union, United Nations, and African Union. As of December 2022, these countries and intergovernmental bodies have largely focused on the significant human rights violations and humanitarian crises in northern Ethiopia. OLLAA is of the firm belief that this response is inadequate. In order to lay the groundwork for lasting peace, the international community must work to ensure all Ethiopian's human rights are respected and that humanitarian assistance is provided to all who need it throughout the country.

The international community must take decisive and immediate action to end the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crises across Ethiopia. The crisis in Tigray is not a solitary, confined conflict. Many areas of Ethiopia are experiencing violence and Oromo citizens are being targeted throughout the country. Left unresolved, it will lead to

multinational violence. The longer the international community and other actors wait to intervene, the greater the risk of multinational war becomes. Historically, violence in Ethiopia has led to regional conflicts involving Sudan, Somalia, and Rwanda. [50] Once the violence spreads and involves other nations, as occurred with the Ethiopian Civil War, decades of bloodshed could follow. This is a crucial moment, not just for Ethiopia, but for the entire international community to step up and act to prevent what could become one of the great humanitarian disasters of our age. The international community must learn from past failures in defending human rights in Ethiopia. [51]

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CURRENT POLICIES TOWARDS ETHIOPIA

The support the US, EU, and Australia have provided to Ethiopia is immense and necessary to help address the dire humanitarian crisis throughout the Horn of Africa. However, the political and diplomatic support the Ethiopian government has received from these powers allows, and in part encourages human rights violations to continue unchecked. As discussed below, each of these world powers has actively ignored or been silent when it comes to addressing the human rights atrocities and targeting against the Oromo people.

The international community has numerous tools at its disposal that it can utilize to pressure the Ethiopian government to make necessary changes in how it treats its civilian population, including the Oromo. This section will examine the steps that have been taken by the international community in recent years in order to respond to past abuses and examine additional steps that these countries and intergovernmental bodies could utilize to apply further pressure on the Ethiopian government.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Since November 2020, the US government has been largely focused on the crisis in the Tigray region and has issued several statements calling for all parties to the conflict to halt hostilities and lay the groundwork for lasting peace and for humanitarian access to the region. [52] However, the US government has consistently failed to call attention to other internal Ethiopian conflicts and human rights violations. For example, Oromo communities were disappointed to find that the US State Department's annual report on Ethiopia's Human Rights Practices failed to cover the pattern of human rights violations perpetrated against Oromo civilians throughout Ethiopia, and, when it did note acts of violence in Oromia, it focused exclusively on acts of violence perpetrated by the OLA, thus giving the impression that they are the sole perpetrators of human rights abuses committed against civilians inside Oromia. [53]

The first substantial action taken by the US to address the crisis in northern Ethiopia was in May 2021, when the US Secretary of State announced visa restrictions for "Ethiopian and Eritrean officials, military personnel, and other individuals" who were found

to be responsible for undermining efforts to resolve the situation in Tigray, alongside prohibiting the export of defense services to Ethiopia. [54]

In September 2021, President Biden issued an executive order which authorized the imposition of sanctions on individuals who had committed human rights abuses or obstructed the delivery of humanitarian aid to northern Ethiopia. [55] In November 2021, the US Secretary of State announced had designated "six targets associated with the Eritrean government and ruling party" to be sanctioned pursuant to this order. [56] In February 2022, the US Department of Treasury Office of Foreign Assets (OFAC) issued regulations to implement this order. However, as of the time of publication of this paper, no additional sanctions had been applied under this Executive Order, although it was renewed in September 2022. [57]

The US also utilized economic policies in order to pressure the Ethiopian government to comply with its international human rights legal obligations, when, in November 2021, the Biden administration announced their decision to suspend Ethiopia's access to the African Growth and

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Opportunity Act (AGOA), a US trade program that provided Ethiopia duty-free access to the United States. [58] Ultimately, the Biden administration terminated Ethiopia's designation as an AGOA beneficiary on January 1, 2022. [59]

The US also attempted to pass legislative measures to address the situation in Ethiopia. In November 2021, the Ethiopian Peace and Democracy Protection Act of 2021 was introduced in the Senate, and was followed by a companion bill in the House in February 2022. While focused largely on the crisis in northern Ethiopia, if passed, these bills would have called on the US federal government to implement several measures to address the human rights and humanitarian situation in Ethiopia, including by calling on the President to impose sanctions on persons who had "expanded or extended" the civil war or other conflicts in Ethiopia; committed gross violations of human rights; "obstructed, delayed, or diverted" the provision of humanitarian assistance throughout Ethiopia; or provided weapons, such as drones, to any party to conflicts in the country. It would have also stopped the US from providing assistance to Ethiopian security forces, and

authorized the President to provide support to efforts to preserve evidence of atrocities in Ethiopia and pursue accountability for human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

The US government has taken several measures to ensure the flow of humanitarian aid to Ethiopia in the past year. Altogether, in 2021 the US "provided nearly \$1.3 billion...for the health, development, and humanitarian needs of all Ethiopians" and in 2022 provided \$488 million for drought relief. [60] In April 2022, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) announced that it would provide almost \$313 million in "additional humanitarian assistance to help people affected by the ongoing conflict in northern Ethiopia." [61] In July 2022, the US, via USAID, provided an additional \$488 million in response to a historically unprecedented drought that threatens the survival of more than 8.1 million people throughout the Horn of Africa. [62]



AUSTRALIA

Like the US, Australia has issued several statements noting their concerns regarding the escalating crisis in Ethiopia, again focused largely on the situation in Tigray and northern Ethiopia. For example, in October 2021, it issued a statement regarding the airstrikes on the Tigray capital [63] and in December 2021, following the declaration of a nationwide state of emergency in Ethiopia, they issued a joint statement with Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States regarding the “detention of large numbers of Ethiopian citizens on the basis of their ethnicity and without charge.” [64] At the same time, the government has consistently failed to call attention to the human rights situation facing the Oromo and others in southern Ethiopia.

The Australian government has also taken steps to address the

humanitarian crisis throughout Ethiopia over the past year. For example, in September 2022, Australia announced the provision of \$15 million Australian dollars in emergency assistance to Yemen and Ethiopia to address the ongoing food crisis, which will be provided directly to non-government organizations on the ground. [65] Aid organizations across Australia have consistently called on the Australian government to take further steps to address the humanitarian crisis across the Horn of Africa. [66]

It should be noted that Australia, much like the US, allows for the imposition of targeted financial sanctions and travel bans on individuals who have engaged in serious abuses of human rights, [67] although, at this time, it does not appear that the government has considered applying against individuals in Ethiopia.



EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

Like the US and Australia, the EU has consistently issued statements and comments on the war in Tigray. [68] The EU has also taken some actions to pressure the Ethiopian government to respect human rights and to ensure the flow of humanitarian aid across the country.

For example, in October 2021, the EU parliament adopted a resolution on the humanitarian situation in Tigray. [69] Although this resolution focused largely on the conflict in northern Ethiopia, it did contain several provisions that could be applied throughout the country, including its calls for an independent and impartial commission of inquiry to investigate attacks targeting specific ethnic groups throughout Ethiopia; for Ethiopia to ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC; and for an inclusive national political dialogue to find a solution to the crisis, including representatives from all the affected areas (Tigray, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Afar, Oromia, Sidama, Somali, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), and Gambella). [70] While this is a positive step, we note that the European Union has generally paid relatively little attention to the situation in Oromia and throughout southern Ethiopia.

In October 2022, the European Parliament adopted another resolution on the human rights and humanitarian situation in Tigray, with a particular focus on the rights of children. Like the resolution adopted in 2021, this resolution focused largely on the situation in northern Ethiopia but did contain provisions that could be used to address violations throughout Ethiopia, including by calling on the EU and member states to utilize the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime against perpetrators of human rights abuses. It should be noted that while the EU has the power to apply sanctions against individuals for human rights violations, [71] the EU has yet to issue sanctions against any actors involved in the Ethiopian crisis.

In response to continued violence in the region, in January 2022, the EU announced that it had decided to “suspend budget support for Ethiopia worth 88 million Euros” until humanitarian agencies were granted access to those in need in the Tigray region. [72] In July 2022, the European Commission began the approval process to provide \$84.2 million in aid for mostly health and education while continuing its hold on the provision of direct support to Prime Minister Abiy's administration. [73]

UNITED NATIONS (UN)

The UN has regularly expressed its concern about the human rights situation in Tigray and northern Ethiopia. For example, in November 2021, the then-UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, appealed for peace following the declaration of a nationwide state of emergency in Ethiopia. [74] Although the UN's focus has largely been on the situation in northern Ethiopia, they have, on rare occasions, highlighted the situation in Oromia. During a special session of the UN Human Rights Council in December 2021, Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, spoke about how the state of emergency had led to "significant human rights concerns" across the country, and noted reports of the arbitrary detention of civilians in the Guji zone of the Oromia region. [75] In

an August 2022 statement by UN Secretary-General António Guterres regarding the resumption of conflict in Tigray, he called for the cessation of hostilities and noted that Ethiopian civilians, including "Tigrayans, Amharas, Oromos, and Afars, have already suffered too much." [76]

In December 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted a resolution during a special session on the situation in Ethiopia. In the resolution, the HRC decided to establish an international commission of human rights experts on Ethiopia tasked with conducting "thorough and impartial investigations into allegations of violations and abuses" committed since November 2020. [77]



UNITED NATIONS (UN) CONT.

In September 2022, the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) released its first report outlining the results of its investigations. Although the report focused on a few key incidents and thematic violations that occurred in the Tigray and Amhara regions, it noted they had received reliable information about three large-scale killings of citizens in Oromia between June-August 2022, and that they had, “received reports of attacks against Oromo civilians by numerous perpetrators, including ENDF, Amhara militias, and Oromia Special Forces.” They explicitly declared their intentions to investigate abuses

committed inside Oromia in future reports by stating that, “[f]urther investigation into these incidents, as well as the wider situation of communities in Oromia, is recommended.” [78]

Finally, the United Nations Security Council has held regular meetings since the conflict began in November 2020. Their latest meeting was in October 2022, when the council received an update on the status of fighting in northern Ethiopia. [79] Theoretically, this body has the ability to establish a specialized court regarding atrocity crimes in Ethiopia or make a referral to the ICC, although it has not given any indication that it intends to do so at this time.



Kaari Betty Murungi, Chair of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, speaks about the presentation of the first report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia during a press conference at the European headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022. (Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP)

AFRICAN UNION (AU)

In June 2021, the AU launched an investigation into human rights violations in Tigray which has been led by a commission created under the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Their mandate is to "investigate allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and to gather all relevant information so as to determine whether the allegations constitute serious and massive violations of human rights." [80] As of November 2022, no updates or findings from the investigation have been publicly disclosed.

In November 2022, the AU, led by their Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa, former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, led a series of peace talks in South Africa. this led to the Ethiopian government

and the TPLF agreeing to a permanent cessation of hostilities. [81] In addition to the ceasefire agreement, the peace agreement stipulates that the Ethiopian government establish a "comprehensive national transitional justice policy," which is to be developed "with inputs from all stakeholders, and civil society groups." Such a transitional justice policy, if properly applied across Ethiopia, could include an inclusive dialogue process, provide victims of human rights violations access to justice, and help to lay the groundwork for lasting peace and regional stability. [82]

Unfortunately, the African Union has, as of this time, consistently failed to recognize or address the violence and instability inside Oromia.



Redwan Hussein, left, representing the Ethiopian government, and Getachew Reda, right, representing the Tigray People's Liberation Front, sign a peace agreement after peace talks in Pretoria, South Africa, on November 2. Phill Magakoe/AFP via Getty Images

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The ongoing and growing interregional conflicts in Ethiopia threaten to destabilize the entire Horn of Africa. In November 2020, a bipartisan, US senior study group warned that “polarization of [Ethiopia] would mark the death knell for the country’s nascent reform effort that began two years ago and the promise of a democratic transition that it heralded.” [83] The fragmentation of Ethiopia would be “the largest state collapse in modern history,” and the study group’s Final Report shows that the current conflict could easily escalate to full fragmentation and collapse. [84] Therefore, the international community must encourage and pressure the Ethiopian government to undertake specific reforms that will restore rule of law in the country and lay the groundwork for lasting peace. While the recent peace deal with the TPLF is a noteworthy achievement that cannot be overlooked, it seems unlikely it will have the desired effect of leading to peace throughout Ethiopia unless other conflicts throughout Ethiopia are also addressed.

In order to do so, the international community must not only educate themselves on what

is happening throughout the country and but also adopt a whole-of-country approach in their foreign policy towards Ethiopia. OLLAA supports international foreign policies that incorporate intervention, international support, and education. Finally, OLLAA is of the firm belief that, in order to achieve lasting peace, independent international investigations must be launched into all credible allegations of human rights violations committed throughout the country since Prime Minister Abiy’s rise to power in 2018. These investigations should ultimately tie into transitional justice measures, including a national dialogue, that includes representatives of all ethnic and political groups and ensure access to justice for victims of human rights violations.

The political and diplomatic support various governments have provided to Prime Minister Abiy’s government must be altered in light of the human rights violations it has permitted to go unchecked throughout the southern part of the country. Over the past two years, the US, UN, AU, EU, and Australia all have issued statements condemning

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS CONT.

the violence occurring in northern Ethiopia. However, they must also consider issuing similar statements condemning violence across the country, and pressing for peace in other regions as well. Governments should also consider using economic tools to pressure the Ethiopian government to comply with its international human rights legal obligations, like the US did when it removed Ethiopia from AGOA eligibility, alongside the suspension of aid, as the EU did in 2021. Multiple countries, including the US, Australia, and the EU, have the ability to apply sanctions against individuals who have committed human rights violations. While the US has authorized the use of such sanctions to address the conflict in northern Ethiopia, thus far, they have only designated Eritreans under these sanctions.

The US should consider applying these sanctions against other individuals who have committed human rights abuses, and other countries should seriously consider designating individuals inside Ethiopia for abuses as well.

As noted above, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) has established a commission tasked with investigating human rights violations committed across

Ethiopia since November 2020. All members of the HRC should extend their support to this investigative body, and ensure that the Commission's work continues for as long as is necessary to fulfill its mandate.

In addition, the UN and interested countries should apply pressure on the Ethiopian government to ensure that the Commissioners are granted full access to all regions of Ethiopia, including Oromia, so that they may conduct their investigations. For its part, the Commission should consider abuses across the country, and issue strong recommendations to the Ethiopian government on truly inclusive transitional justice measures and ensuring accountability for victims of human rights violations.

Other UN bodies should also consider utilizing the tools at their disposal to pressure the Ethiopian government to respect its international legal obligations and to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance throughout the country. This includes statements by officials, such as the UN Secretary-General and the High Commission on Human Rights, which could highlight human rights abuses

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS CONT.

across the country. In addition, the UN Security Council should consider utilizing its powers to make a referral to the International Criminal Court regarding potential crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes that may have been committed during the conflict in northern Ethiopia or in other conflicts throughout the country.

Finally, the African Union played a leading role in bringing the TPLF and the Ethiopian government to the table for negotiations in Pretoria that recently led to a peace agreement between the two parties. Given their influence, they should extend pressure on the Ethiopian government to seek similar means to peacefully resolve the other conflicts in Ethiopia. This could include taking a leading role in any transitional justice measures that are ultimately adopted, and ensuring that such processes are truly inclusive and transparent. The AU should also provide an update as to their investigation into human rights violations in Tigray, and consider expanding their scope to include human rights abuses committed across the country, particularly Oromia.

International cooperation and solidarity will be key to ensuring that human rights are respected across Ethiopia and that humanitarian assistance is provided to all who need it. Therefore, the international community must come together and agree to apply uniform political and diplomatic pressure on the Ethiopian government. OLLAA recommends that the international community intervene with a measured and coordinated response to the human rights abuses perpetrated against Ethiopian civilians.



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OLLAA's Executive Director, Seena Jimjimo appearing on VOA Afaan Oromoo in Feb 2023 to discuss recommendations for peace negotiations in Oromia and southern Ethiopia. Source: VOA/Facebook

SPECIFIC REFORMATIONS OF ETHIOPIAN POLICY

OLLAA believes that the US, UN, AU, EU, and Australia can utilize the diplomatic tools at their disposal in order to pressure the Ethiopian government to protect the rights of Oromos and lay the groundwork for lasting peace and regional stability. In particular, they should encourage the Ethiopian government to:

1. Restore the rule of law in Oromia and ensure that detained individuals' rights are respected. This includes ensuring that court orders for the release of prisoners are obeyed; that torture is not used to elicit confessions; arbitrary arrests of individuals for purported connections to the OLA are ceased; that unsanitary prison conditions are addressed; and that prisoners have access to medical care.
2. Consider amending laws that have been used to violate the rights of civilians, including but not limited to:
 - a. A Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism Crimes (Proclamation No. 1176/2020) [85], which has been used to target Oromo activists.
 - b. The Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation (Proclamation No. 1185/2020) [86], which has been used to target activists and others who are critical of the Ethiopian government's policies.
3. Ensure that prompt and effective investigations are launched into all credible reports of human rights violations committed against civilians, whether the alleged perpetrators are State agents or non-State armed actors, and that the perpetrators are held accountable.
4. Work together with the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and ensure their unhindered access throughout Ethiopia, and encourage them to investigate the situation in Oromia.
5. Ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all individuals affected by the drought and conflict throughout Ethiopia, particularly Oromia. Take steps to ensure that humanitarian aid is not misused.

SPECIFIC REFORMATIONS OF ETHIOPIAN POLICY

6. Ensure that any transitional justice measures adopted following the recent peace agreement with the TPLF are truly inclusive, and provide victims of human rights violations access to justice.
7. Halting hostilities in all impacted regions of Ethiopia followed by comprehensive ceasefire agreements with armed groups to create a conducive environment for an inclusive dialogue.
8. Working with the partners in the international community and all relevant parties inside Ethiopia to establish an independent, impartial commission tasked with facilitating an all-inclusive and transparent dialogue process overseen by neutral arbiters that are acceptable to all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

Ethiopia is currently experiencing a series of complex and interconnected crises with their roots in the pattern of oppressive tactics utilized to suppress Ethiopia's diverse population since its formation in the late 19th century. Despite their population size, the Oromo have been one of the most marginalized ethnic groups in Ethiopia since its formation. It is important for the international community to both understand the history of human rights abuses committed against the Oromos and others in the south and to broaden their current policy towards Ethiopia in

response. In order to truly achieve lasting peace in the region, it will be essential for any investigations or transitional justice measures to be truly inclusive in order to facilitate peace and reconciliation among all political parties and ethnic groups while working towards necessary policy reforms to restore the rule of law in the country, ensure the protection of all civilians' human rights, and ensure the provision of humanitarian aid to those persons most in need. Only then will lasting peace and regional stability come to the Horn of Africa.

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