



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[2 February 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Of Journalists and Activists Reporting on The Persecution Of Amharas In Ethiopia**

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers are particularly concerned about the dramatic shrinking of the freedom of journalists and media outlets in Ethiopia. The federal law enforcement forces and the judiciary and have largely abused their mandate throughout last year.

In 2022, quite a number of journalists and activists reporting on the persecution of Amharas were victims of arbitrary arrest and detention as the incidents hereafter clearly show.

### **Journalist Abay Zewdu: 10 days and 24 days in prison**

Journalist and editor-in-chief of Amhara Media Center, Abay Zewdu has been arbitrarily detained by authorities on two occasions. He was first detained on 18 July 2021, after reporting an attack on Amhara residents of the Kemashi Zone in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region of Ethiopia.

“In 2021, there was an incident where Gumuz militias attacked ethnic Amhara residents in the Kemashi Zone of Benishangul-Gumuz Region. There were at least 50 residents killed in the attack and many others were displaced. About 200 of the internally displaced residents (from Kemashi) came to Addis Ababa. I met with these residents and interviewed them. I reported the situation in Benishangul-Gumuz and the conditions of the victims on Amhara Media Center. The government was unhappy and detained me for reporting the truth. They detained me for 10 days in the prison center and released me on a 5,000 ETB bail.”

Abay was finally able to secure a refund after several attempts.

Abay was arbitrarily detained for a second time on 10 September 2022. The security personnel did not specify the reason for his arrest. He was detained for 24 days but the officials failed to establish formal charges against him.

### **Journalist Meskerem Abera: 23 and 22 days in prison**

Meskerem Abera is a well-known political analyst, journalist and founder of Ethio-Nikat Media, an independent news channel. She uses her platform to bring awareness to the plight of Amhara people across Ethiopia, and particularly in the Oromia Region. She is a vocal critic of the federal and regional governments’ failure and negligence in protecting civilians.

Meskerem said the following:

“I was arrested on 21 May 2022 and detained at Bole Airport when I landed from Bahir Dar. Members of the federal police force did not communicate the reason for my arrest. They said they wanted me for interrogation purposes.”

Meskerem was released on a 15,000 ETB bail after being arbitrarily detained for 23 days. Federal security force seized two of her laptops, her passport, and two mobile phones along with SIM cards. As of the beginning of 2023, her confiscated properties and bail money had not been returned to her despite her repeated requests.

On 13 December 2022, when Meskerem was once again arrested by security forces in the Area of Addis Ababa, they told her husband (Fitsum Gebremicheal) that they were taking her to the Federal Bureau of Investigations for interrogation purposes.

On 15 December 2022, Meskerem was presented before the Federal High Court. She was accused of “dividing the national defense force and spreading hate and inciting violence using private media”. She was released on 5 January 2023 with bail money of 50,000 ETB.

### **Journalist Meaza Mohammed: 57 days in prison in all**

Meaza Mohammed, a well-known journalist, human rights advocate and humanitarian officer, has been arbitrarily detained several times since Prime Minister Abiy came to power. Meaza is the owner of a news platform called Roha Media. She is known for her coverage of human rights abuses and humanitarian issues including interviews with victims of war and violence. Her programs have also covered other issues such as the role of the regional and federal governments in the ongoing Amhara genocide in Ethiopia along with the deliberate sabotage of Amhara Special Forces and Fano in Northern Ethiopia.

Meaza has been arrested on three occasions since late 2021. Her first arrest was in December 2021 after Roha Media aired interviews of Amhara women raped by members of the TPLF militia occupying northern parts of the Amhara Region. She was accused of “transmitting messages that incite violence”. Meaza was released on 18 January 2022, without bail.

Meaza was arrested again on 28 May 2022 and accused of “inciting a riot”. She was detained for 20 days and released on 10,000 ETB bail. Her third and most recent arrest was on 7 September 2022. She was detained for 37 days and only released after paying a bail of 10,000 ETB.

### **Journalist Gobeze Sisay: 9 and 64 days in prison**

Gobeze Sisay is a journalist and founder of media outlet Voice of Amhara. Gobeze is also a renowned human rights advocate of civilians impacted by attacks from various armed groups. He denounced the government’s failure to protect civilians. Gobeze has been arrested twice on two occasions since the beginning of 2022. The first detention came in May 2022 when government forces stormed his residence and arrested him without presenting a court-issued arrest warrant. He was detained incommunicado in an unknown place. During his detention, he was blindfolded and repeatedly interrogated by security personnel. He was released nine days later without bail.

Gobeze was again arrested in August 2022, charged with “disclosing secrets of the national defence force” and detained for 64 days. On 10 November 2022, the Federal Supreme Court ordered his release on a bail of 100,000 ETB.

### **Journalist Temesgen Desalegn: 5 months and 21 days in prison**

Temesgen Desalegn is a Managing Director and owner of the weekly Amharic magazine Feteḥ. Early in 2022, Temesgen did a feature on B.G. Tefera Mamo, former commander of the ASF. The feature covered a detailed analysis of the federal government’s deliberate sabotage of the Amhara region’s defence mechanism, particularly the sabotage of the ASF on Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s orders. It criticized the ENDF for abandoning citizens and prosecuting Fano members during the invasion of the Amhara region by TPLF forces.

Temesgen was arrested on 26 May 2022, after being accused of disclosing national secrets to the public, inciting a riot, and creating public distrust in the ENDF. On 4 July 2022, the Federal High Court granted Temesgen 100,000 ETB bail but he was not released until 16 November 2022, and only after posting an additional 30,000 ETB bail.

### **The case of Ashara Media and Nisir International Broadcasting Corporation journalists: more than 50 days in prison**

On 19-20 May 2022, security personnel in Bahir Dar city of Ethiopia’s Amhara region raided the studios of two media outlets, Ashara Media and Nisir International. The officers arrested several reporters and administrative workers. They also illegally seized media and office equipment. Three Ashara Media journalists Gashaye Nigussie, Getinet Yalew, and Habtamu Melese were arbitrarily detained. In addition, videographer and camera operators Kelemu Gelagay and Daniel Mesfin were also detained by regional security forces. Nisir International

Broadcasting Corporation journalists Haile-Mariam Tizazu, Yared Awoke, and another staffer were detained by security personnel from the Amhara region.

The arrests came after both media outlets reported on the government's recent crackdown on Fano members. They were accused of inciting violence against the government. They were detained for 49 days. The Amhara Supreme Court released them with a bail of 20,000 ETB each but the federal police instantly detained them again for one more week. They were only freed after paying one more bail of 20,000 ETB.

### **The case of Historian and Journalist Tadios Tantu: still in prison**

Tadios Tantu is a prominent journalist, a political analyst and historian born from the Welayta ethnic group. At the age of 73 years, Tadios has been a long-time government critic, human rights advocate and staunch opponent of revisionist history. He served in the free press for many years as a columnist and editor in Amharic newspapers such as Yezareyitu Ethiopia, Ethiopis, Fiteh, Ethio Mehdar, Satenaw and other local magazines.

Tadios was arbitrarily arrested on 5 May 2021 by federal security forces without reasonable grounds. This action resulted in serious financial problems for Tadios who struggled to help his family and was unable to withdraw money from his bank account. In June 2021, the court released him with the procedure of habeas corpus without bail.

On 19 May 2022, Tadios was rearrested by federal security forces. Despite paying a bail of 10,000 ETB, he was not released. On August 2022, the Lideta High Court decided to release him on bail but he was not because the prosecutor instituted concurrent charges against him: inciting National Defense Force personnel to disobey orders from their commanders, insulting the Oromo and Tigrayan ethnic groups and inciting other ethnic groups to violence. In addition, he was accused of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order of Ethiopia. As of 1 January 2023, he was still in prison.

### **Recommendations**

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers urge the Ethiopian authorities in Addis Ababa

- to stop arresting journalists
- to release Tadios Tantu, a journalist and a historian, who was still behind bars in early January 2023

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Human Rights Without Frontiers, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.