EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. **This report provides an overview of human rights developments related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE) since Ethiopia's last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2019.**
2. The criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual activity by adults leaves them at serious risk of harm and systematic exclusion. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other gender or sexual minority (LGBTQ+) people in Ethiopia report discrimination, violence, lack of protection by law enforcement and government officials, and stigma while accessing services. Lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgender women and other marginalized identities are particularly at risk for such human rights violations.
3. Ethiopia lacks laws that permit transgender people to legally change their gender, which means that transgender men are legally considered to be women and transgender women are legally considered to be men. Transgender individuals who engage in sexual activity with cisgender people of a different gender (e.g. transgender men who have sex with cisgender women and transgender women who have sex with cisgender men) may fall victim to the law criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual activity between adults.
4. In this report we use the acronym LGBTQ to refer to individuals who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer. These terms necessarily do not include everyone who may experience violations of their human rights on the basis of their real or perceived SOGIE status, which is why we also include a "+" with the acronym. Any use of a modified acronym is intentional in that we are speaking only about certain members of the LGBTQ+ population. We also use the term "zega," an Amharic word that means "citizen," but the word has been appropriated by the LGBTQ+ community as a term of self-identification. There are some lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, however, who argue that the term only refers to gay, bisexual, and queer men and transgender individuals.
5. The report also addresses the growing anti-LGBTQ+ campaigning in the country and the limited digital rights and protections of LGBTQ+ individuals.
6. This report concludes that the government of Ethiopia has failed to uphold its human rights obligations regarding sexual and gender minorities, resulting in violence, discrimination, and stigma. This report reviews specific human rights violations that require immediate attention by the Government of Ethiopia, including the right to equality and non-discrimination, freedom of association, and the right to health care.
7. First-hand information from LGBTQ+ Ethiopians, both in Ethiopia and those that have sought asylum abroad, has been used in this submission with their permission.

I. IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

A41 Constitutional and legislative framework; B31 Equality & non-discrimination; G2 Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and intersex persons (LGBTI)

Status of Implementation: Not Accepted, Not Implemented

8. In its Third-Cycle review, Ethiopia received and noted four recommendations pertaining to LGBTQ+ people, including to decriminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity (CSSSA), to recognize LGBTQ+ people's rights to equality and non-discrimination, and to combat violence and stigmatization against them.[1] The Government of Ethiopia has undertaken no voluntary commitments to implement these recommendations.

9. Sexual conduct between consenting adults of the same sex remains a crime in Ethiopia. Under the Criminal Code of Ethiopia, "[w]hoever performs with another person of the same sex a homosexual act, or any other indecent act, is punishable with simple imprisonment."[2] According to Article 630 of the Criminal Code, the "punishment shall be simple imprisonment for not less than one year, or, in grave cases, rigorous imprisonment not exceeding ten years" in cases involving certain aggravating circumstances, and the "punishment shall be rigorous imprisonment from three years to fifteen years" in cases involving other specified aggravating circumstances.[3]

10. Article 640 further criminalizes possessing or disseminating "grossly indecent material," including providing any information on how to obtain "grossly indecent material."[4] The Government has reportedly used this provision to block the websites of LGBTQ+ organizations. The co-author of this report, House of Guramayle, was the subject of a ddos attack on 12 August 2023, in which its server was flooded with high amounts of internet traffic, causing the website to crash and its site rendered inaccessible both within Ethiopia and abroad.

11. Article 69 of the Charities and Societies Proclamation Law (Law No. 621) forbids groups that are contrary to "public morality" or engage in illegal activity from registering with the government.[5] LGBTQ+ human rights defenders fear that this law prohibits them from legally registering their organizations, however this has not yet been tested.[6] Although LGBTQ+ organizations have previously tried to register with no success, it was under the previous Charities and Societies Proclamation Law. No attempts have been made under the current law.[7]

12. Ethiopia has undeservedly received a reputation as a "relatively safe" country for LGBTQ+ people because the Government has made no moves to expand criminalization of CSSSA and other related legislation that would crack down on the LGBTQ+ community. There are also few public cases of the Government enforcing Article 630 (with the exceptions of the examples in paragraphs 15-18 below).[8]

13. In November 2019, the Authority for Civil Society Organization (ACSO) granted legal recognition to the association "We will not be silent about Ethiopia: let us save the generation from Sodomy." Under the leadership of a prominent Orthodox Christian priest, this organization has been actively campaigning against the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals by holding meetings with various government ministries, including the

Ministry of Tourism, the Addis Ababa Mayor's Office, the Ministry of Peace, the Attorney General's Office, the Addis Ababa Police Commission, and the Ministry of Children, Youth, and Women.[9]

14. The association has also been engaging in the practice of conversion therapy as a means to "rehabilitate" LGBTQ+ individuals. This religious-based conversion therapy is one of the methods by which LGBTQ+ Ethiopians are subjected to violence and social exclusion and receive no protection from the State. The Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity (IE on SOGI) has advocated for a worldwide ban of conversion therapy on the grounds that it inflicts severe physical and psychological anguish and harm on LGBTQ+ individuals.[10]

15. Between 2019 and 2023, ILGA World recorded seven individuals against whom the Government enforced the laws criminalizing CSSSA. Although low, these numbers likely do not reflect the actual number of people who have been arrested, arbitrarily detained, or charged with CSSSA as most incidents "go unreported or undocumented."[11]

16. In January 2020, police arrested three men on two separate occasions. Police arrested the first man on suspicion of pedophilia; police arrested the other two men for "looking gay." Law enforcement held the first man for one month, but ultimately released him because there was no evidence to support the charge. Police held the second two men for three days, during which time other inmates beat them.[12]

17. In January 2021, police in Addis Ababa arrested and detained two men for six days for "looking gay." Following their release, police notified their families of why they had been arrested and one of the men committed suicide.[13]

18. In May 2021, police arrested another individual for "looking gay." It is unknown how long they remained in police custody, but following their release they have "gone into hiding and begun the process of seeking asylum."[14]

19. In addition, law enforcement and correctional officers subject LGBTQ+ people in detention to inhuman and degrading treatment. There are credible accounts of gay and bisexual men being coerced into sleeping in toilets, being subjected to acts of urination upon their person, and acts of sexual violence while under detention.[15]

20. Due to a widespread lack of information on LGBTQ+ Ethiopians' lived experiences, it is difficult to report on the violations of their human rights, which is likely due to the fact that CSSSA between adults remains criminalized and "both non-conforming sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions are heavily stigmatised."[16]

21. LGBTQ+ people experience high rates of violence and harassment because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. In a survey of 198 Ethiopians who self-identify as LGBT by the Southern and East African Research Collective on Health (SEARCH), nearly 35% of individuals reported experiencing sexual orientation and/or gender identity (SOGI) related verbal harassment, 30% experienced sexual violence, and nearly 37% experienced physical violence.[17]

22. Lesbian and bisexual women are at particular risk of sexual violence, with 39% of lesbian women and 50% of bisexual women reporting having experienced sexual violence during their lifetimes.[18]

23. Although SEARCH notes that compared to other countries in East Africa these percentages may be low, very few of the individuals surveyed were open about their

sexuality, gender identity, and/or gender expression (SOGIE), with only 3% saying that people who lived near them knew about them and only 4% of those with whom they worked knew about their SOGIE. SEARCH suggests that "it is likely that people who would harass them [people who self-identify as LGBT] might simply not know about their SOGIE either, and thus not have a reason to harass them."[19] Two-thirds of the people surveyed reported that they believe the violence they experienced was due to their SOGIE.[20]

24. Further, LGBTQ+ people who experience verbal harassment, sexual violence, and physical violence lack the necessary mental health, medical, and legal resources to recover from these violations, in part because of the criminalization of CSSSA between adults and the high social stigma against LGBTQ+ people. Those resources that do exist likely lack training in how to respond to LGBTQ+ people who have experienced violence on the basis of SOGIE.[21]

25. LGBTQ+ people who experience harassment or violence rarely report these incidents to police, likely due to fears that doing so will open them up to possible criminalization for CSSSA between adults. This fear of prosecution also likely restricts LGBTQ+ people who experience intimate partner violence from a same-sex partner or someone legally recognized as a same-sex partner from reporting such violence to police.[22]

26. In May 2023, House of Guramayle, began documenting a rise in the circulation of TikTok videos that had been secretly recorded at a public event. Creators of the videos named the people in the videos as LGBTQ+. Family members and friends of the people depicted in the videos came across or were sent these videos. Some of the individuals depicted reported being evicted from their homes or experiencing physical violence in their schools.[23]

27. In August 2023, House of Guramayle documented a new surge of TikTok videos displaying pictures and videos of people whom the creators allege are LGBTQ+. The creators and many of the people commenting on the videos call for the presumed LGBTQ+ people to be beaten, burned, and killed.[24]

28. Some of the videos posted to TikTok include LGBTQ+ individuals' full names and addresses. Many of those depicted in the August videos have left home and dropped out of university due to the threats and violence from their classmates and family members.[25]

29. House of Guramayle interviewed five individuals, three of whom identify as zega (see paragraph 4, above), depicted in videos on TikTok between May and August 2023. All of them experienced violations of their human rights following their outings (see Annex I). Many of them dropped out of school because they feared that their classmates would subject them to harassment and violence. Others could not return home after family members discovered or were sent their videos because their family members had threatened violence or death. One person was seriously injured by two people who had seen the video. It does not appear that any of these people reported these threats or incidents of violence to police.

30. The videos on TikTok openly encourage violence, calling for the killing, burning, and beating of those suspected of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community within Ethiopia. Vigilante justice is promoted, and videos and photographs of forced confessions and physical assaults are widely shared, often including personal details like phone numbers or addresses of the accused. The threat of violence has dramatically expanded to include

threats against the families of accused LGBTQ+ individuals.[26]

31. The content referenced above meets the threshold of incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence, which is prohibited by Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[27] — to which Ethiopia is a signatory. When such incitement is accompanied by doxxing, the potential impact to individuals targeted by the people behind these accounts can have fatal implications for LGBTQ+ people, as was seen in the case of David Kato in Uganda.[28]

32. While the Ethiopian government is mandated with the duty to protect and promote fundamental rights and freedoms as stated in Article 12 of the Constitution, tech companies such as TikTok have also committed[29] to upholding human rights standards in their operations, including those provided in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). To this end, human rights experts such as the former U.N Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, have noted[30] that social media companies' opaque content moderation enforcement practices leave end-users who report harms such as doxxing and hate-speech with limited avenues of redress when companies do not comply with human rights standards or their own community guidelines.

33. The evidence of this can be seen in TikTok's response to House of Guramayle's escalation of the cases of incitement to violence on the platform. House of Guramayle has flagged, reported, and had successfully deleted 110 videos outing and calling for physical violence against LGBTQ+ Ethiopians as of December 2023, many of the videos were on TikTok for weeks before TikTok deleted the videos for violating their guidelines.[31]

34. In August 2023, Government institutions also began releasing public statements on social media that indicated a further crackdown against LGBTQ+ people. The Addis Ababa Tourism Bureau posted to Facebook that hotels must not permit "homosexual activities" at their facilities or face "action." The Addis Ababa Police Commission also announced a hotline to report "'illegal activities that deviate from the law and social values.'"[32]

35. A report by Amnesty International indicates that by 2021, there were an estimated 6.4 million Facebook users in Ethiopia.[33] Therefore, when such inflammatory statements are disseminated by State authorities on social media with the intent to incite discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, in contexts of hostility offline, they are determined to have met the threshold of six part test set out in the Rabat Plan of Action.[34] In Ethiopia, the impact of the proliferation of such inciteful content in contexts of hostility, conflict or crisis can be severe for communities at risk offline, as has been seen in the conflict in Tigray.[35]

36. Following these announcements in paragraph 34, the Addis Ababa Peace and Security Office raided a guesthouse after it received a tip that alleged "heinous" acts were happening on site. Officers arrested the manager, but it is unclear on what charges.[36]

37. The Government's inadequate response in addressing the hostile environment created by non-State actors is further evidence of its failure to take a stand against the pushback against the European Union and the Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (SAMOA) agreement signed in November 2023. Following the signature of the SAMOA agreement, religious institutions and anti-LGBTQ+ organizations began publishing petitions, online videos, and press releases alleging that the agreement is forcing the Government to promote LGBTQ+ rights. Concerns raised by the House of Guramayle suggest that the anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments surrounding this agreement may

result in a renewed surge of harassment and violence against the LGBTQ+ community.[37]

38. The Advocates' clients have also provided direct information about their experiences with discrimination and violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. One client described the response of his family members when they found out about his sexual orientation. When the client revealed his sexual orientation on Facebook, his mother accused him of doing so in order to intentionally hurt the family. Other family members called and messaged the client informing him that they were cutting off contact with him.[38]

39. Another client explained that LGBTQ+ individuals are subject not only to discrimination from their families and community members, but also face persecution by the Government. The client fears for his life in Ethiopia, and keeps his sexual orientation hidden on his social media. LGBTQ+ individuals are highly stigmatized in the client's home community, and his father has expressed the belief that LGBTQ+ individuals are fundamentally inhuman. According to the client, the Government withholds licenses from nonprofits that attempt to lobby for LGBTQ+ rights and forces them to shut down. The client also explained that public universities are not allowed to publish any work related to LGBTQ+ rights.[39]

40. The distribution of non-consensual intimate imagery is a form of image-based abuse that bad faith actors use to blackmail, doxx, and harass LGBTQ+ people. When these images are also shared with an individual's personal identifiable information, the risks to safety and security are severe. One client reported that he was blackmailed by a private guard at a hotel, who threatened to tell his family if the client did not perform oral sex on him. The next day, the guard returned with a friend, and the client was forced to perform oral sex on both of them. The guard took pictures and threatened to show the pictures to the client's family if he did not continue to comply. The third time the guard returned, he raped the client, which caused the client physical injury and severe mental harm.[40]

41. Another client recalled an incident in which a man in his community was found severely beaten and injured after rumors spread that the man was gay. The client has written articles anonymously for an Ethiopian LGBTQ+ group, which frequently receives death threats from authorities in Ethiopia.[41]

42. Ethiopia does not have a law against hate crimes, or any other law that would support the investigation or prosecutions of human rights abuses against LBGTQ+ individuals.

E41 Right to health care; H3 Persons living with HIV/AIDS

Status of Implementation: Not Accepted, Not Implemented

43. In its Third-Cycle review, Ethiopia received and noted one recommendation from Iceland to "[a]mend the national road map for HIV prevention and other national health policies to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals as 'key populations."[42] The 2020-2025 National Health Equity Strategic Plan makes no mention of LGBTQ+ individuals.[43]

44. In 2019, SEARCH surveyed 198 Ethiopians who self-identified as being LGBT. Of those 198, seven participants self-identified as gender minorities (transgender women, transgender men, and/or gender non-conforming individuals). Of the gender minority participants in the study, none reported having access to gender-confirming hormone or

surgical interventions.[44]

45. In the same survey, approximately 12% of respondents said they had told their health care providers about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and nearly the same percentage – 11% – said that they had been denied health care because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.[45]

46. The survey further documented that 62% of participants actively tried to hide health information or a health concern related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity from their health care providers. SEARCH opines that many sexual and/or gender minorities are unable to exercise their rights to health because of widespread stigma and prejudice against LGBTQ+ people.[46]

47. This prevailing stigmatization and structural limitations have a significant impact on the access to healthcare services and health-seeking behaviors of LGB Ethiopians. Difficulties in accessing essential resources such as water-based lubricants and sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatment, combined with concerns about confidentiality and stigma from healthcare professionals, often lead LGB individuals to hide the underlying causes of their illnesses or seek alternative avenues for medical assistance.[47]

48. Mental health continues to be a major health need among LGB Ethiopians as evidenced by high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety due to social stigma and violence. Furthermore, research shows a correlation between risky sexual behavior and mental health outcomes.[48]

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

49. This stakeholder report suggests the following recommendations for the Government of Ethiopia:

- Decriminalize sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex under the 2004 Criminal Code.
- Put measures in place to protect individuals from discrimination and abuse based on their sexual orientation by religious leaders and society.
- Take measures to prevent law enforcement from arbitrarily arresting individuals based on their sexual orientation.
- Hold members of law enforcement and vigilante groups accountable for human rights violations against LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Take steps to raise awareness in order to mitigate social prejudices, stigmatization, harassment, discrimination, and violence against individuals because of their sexual orientation.
- Train medical, psychosocial, mental health, and legal resource providers on LGBTQ+ issues, violence, and trauma to better respond to instances of harassment and violence.
- Include LGBTQ+ communities in the definitions of “key and most at risk populations” in the National Health Strategy and put in place measures for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ communities in other national health interventions and

policies.

- Combat hate speech, online harassment and surveillance related to sexual orientation and gender identity, and amend the hate speech and disinformation law to include sexual orientation and gender identity as a protected ground from hate speech.

[1] Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review*: *Ethiopia*, (July 5, 2019), U.N. Doc. A/HRC/42/14, ¶ 163.80 Decriminalize consensual sexual relations between same-sex persons (Spain); ¶ 163.132 Recognize in legislation the right to equality and non-discrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, and take measures to combat violence against them and to guarantee them access to justice (Mexico); ¶ 163.130 Conduct awareness-raising campaigns to prevent the stigmatization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals, with particular emphasis on health professionals; and ¶ 163.131 Take measures to reduce the societal stigma faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, including by repealing provisions in national law that criminalize consensual same-sex relations; Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review*: *Ethiopia,* A*ddendum,* (July 5, 2019), U.N. Doc. A/HRC/42/14/Add.1, ¶ 3.

[2] The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, art. 629.

[3] The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, art. 630.

[4] The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, art. 640.

[5] The Charities and Societies Proclamation Law (Law No. 621) (2009), art. 69.

[6] ILGA World, *State-Sponsored Homophobia: Global legislation overview update, Updated edition,* by Lucas Ramon Mendos, Kellyn Botha, Rafael Carrano Lelis, Enrique López de la Peña, Ilia Savelev, and Daron Tan (Geneva: ILGA, Dec. 2020), 171.

[7] Written Communication from House of Guramayle to The Advocates for Human Rights, (Feb. 5, 2024) (on file with authors).

[8] ILGA World, *Our Identities Under Arrest: A global overview on the enforcement of laws criminalising consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults and diverse gender expressions, 2nd Edition*, by Kellyn Botha (Geneva: ILGA, Nov. 2023), 69.

[9] Written Communication from House of Guramayle to The Advocates for Human Rights, (Feb. 22, 2024) (on file with authors); Dereje Negash (@DerejenegashZewoyniyeZewoyniye), FACEBOOK, (Aug. 17, 2020), https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2722390461367679&id=100007902556199&ref=embed_post.

[10] AFP News Agency, "Ethiopian church leaders push gay 'conversion therapy" YOUTUBE (Sep. 6, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgCxzSm-3MQ; Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Practices of so-called "conversion therapy"* (May 1, 2020), U.N. Doc. A/HRC/44/53, ¶ 87.

[11] ILGA World, *Our Identities Under Arrest: A global overview on the enforcement of laws criminalising consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults and diverse gender expressions, 2nd Edition*, by Kellyn Botha (Geneva: ILGA, Nov. 2023), 69.

[12] ILGA World, *Our Identities Under Arrest: A global overview on the enforcement of laws criminalising consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults and diverse gender expressions, 2nd Edition*, by Kellyn Botha (Geneva: ILGA, Nov. 2023), 69.

[13] ILGA World, *Our Identities Under Arrest: A global overview on the enforcement of laws criminalising consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults and diverse gender expressions, 2nd Edition*, by Kellyn Botha (Geneva: ILGA, Nov. 2023), 69.

[14] ILGA World, *Our Identities Under Arrest: A global overview on the enforcement of laws criminalising consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults and diverse gender expressions, 2nd Edition*, by Kellyn Botha (Geneva: ILGA, Nov. 2023), 69.

[15] Getnet Tadele and Woldekidan Amde, "Digital lawfare and activism by lesbian, gay and bisexual persons in Ethiopia," in Queer Lawfare in Africa: Legal strategies in contexts of LGBTQ+ criminalisation and politicisation, Ed. Adrian Jjuuko et. al (Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press, 2022) 380-382; Written Communication from House of Guramayle to The Advocates for Human Rights, (Apr. 1, 2024) (on file with authors).

[16] Southern and East African Research Collective on Health, *Are we doing alright? Realities of violence, mental health, and access to healthcare related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in Ethiopia: Research report based on a community-led study in nine countries*, by Alex Mülluer and Kristen Daskilewicz (Amsterdam: COC Netherlands, 2019), 24.

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[25] Written Communication from House of Guramayle (Aug. 2024) (on file with authors).
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[35] ibid 32
[36] Martina Schwikowski, *LGBTQ+ Ethiopians flee in the face of sudden crackdown*, DW, Aug. 18, 2023, https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopias-lgbtq-community-face-sudden-wave-of-persecution/a-66571195.
[37] Daniel Itai, Ethiopia's largest church condemns LGBTQ community. Washington Blade, Mar. 7, 2024
[38] Interviews conducted by The Advocates (2015-2024).

[39] Interviews conducted by The Advocates (2015-2024).
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[42] Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review*: *Ethiopia*, (July 5, 2019), U.N. Doc. A/HRC/42/14, ¶ 163.262; Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review*: *Ethiopia, Addendum,* (July 5, 2019), U.N. Doc. A/HRC/42/14/Add.1, ¶ 3.
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