ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

Report submitted to Universal Periodic Review Mechanism on Ethiopia Review

Submitted to: High Commissioner for Human Rights Council to complete requirements of report submitted by Ethiopia to Universal Periodic Review Mechanism.

Submitted by: Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights (holding special consultative status with UN Economic and Social Council)

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Introduction:

Ethiopia's environment, characterized by conflicts, civil wars, violent clashes, and environmental and climate shocks, creates a conducive environment for human rights violations across various domains. These violations encompass civil and political rights, including the right to life, liberty, personal security, freedom of religion and belief, and the right to peaceful assembly, opinion, and expression. Additionally, social and economic rights such as the right to education, health, food, and housing are also affected. Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the human rights situation in Ethiopia over the past four years for the Universal Periodic Review.

First: Political and Civil Rights

Regarding Political and Civil Rights, Maat notes many violations, which can be presented as follows:

1- Right to Life

Ethiopia has been plagued by intense and violent clashes, leading to significant harm to civilians. Between December 2022 and December 2023, the country witnessed approximately 1,256 violent political events, resulting in the loss of 3,373 lives, including 1,276 civilians.[1] Particularly, the Amhara region has experienced a surge in violence since April 2023, following the federal government's decision to integrate regional police forces into the federal army. This has resulted in the deaths of 183 individuals between July and August, 20 in December, and 50 civilians in February 2024. Notably, the city of Merawi has witnessed the highest number of civilian casualties due to the ongoing conflict between the Fano militia and the government in the Amhara region.[2]

2- Right to Freedom and Personal Security

[1] EPO, EPO WEEKLY UPDATE (6 FEBRUARY 2024), Access date February 2024, https://shorter.me/RvJ_n
[2] RW, Ethiopia: EPO Weekly update (20 February 2024), 21 February 2024, https://shorter.me/gsa6e

Despite the Ethiopian Federal Constitution recognizing the right to freedom and personal security under Articles 14 and 17, violations of these rights have been escalating amidst the widespread clashes, fighting, and political violence throughout the country. These violations show no signs of abating. Between November 2021 and February 2022, Ethiopia reported at least 11,527 cases of arbitrary arrest and detention based on ethnic, political, and security considerations. In 2020, the Ethiopian government unlawfully arrested seven prominent members of the Oromo Liberation Front, without providing any legal justification. These individuals were transferred from Burayo Police Station in April 2023, and their whereabouts remain undisclosed.

In 2023, the government intensified its arrests, detaining over 1,000 individuals, predominantly in the Amhara region. This occurred within the context of a state of emergency declared in August 2023, subsequently renewed on February 2, 2024. The state of emergency granted broad powers to arrest suspects without a judicial order and imposed a curfew. On August 4, 2023, a federal parliament member known for criticizing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was arrested, along with an Addis Ababa city council member on August 15.

On December 12, a former Minister of State for Peace and member of the Oromia Regional Council was arrested after criticizing the Prime Minister for atrocities committed in Ethiopia. Furthermore, on February 2, 2024, coinciding with the extension of the state of emergency, D.T., a member of the opposition party in the federal parliament known for criticizing the Prime Minister, was also arrested.

3- Right to Freedom of Religion and Belief

The right to freedom of religion and belief in Ethiopia is experiencing an alarming increase in violations, particularly by the Ethiopian government. The government persistently interferes in religious affairs, leading to numerous violent and disruptive incidents. Statistics from 2021, 2022, and 2023[3] indicate that there were more than 18, 25, and 13 such events, respectively. Since 2022, Ethiopia has been implementing a project called "Shaghar City" in the Oromia region as part of an urban planning initiative. However, this project poses a threat to cultural and religious structures as it involves the integration of six towns surrounding the capital into a wide western arc. The project also entails the destruction of at least 400,000 homes in the future, including more than 300 "illegal" mosques, which has prompted the Ethiopian government to initiate the demolition of homes, mosques, and churches without proper title deeds. In the second half of 2023, statistics revealed that over 22 Islamic mosques were demolished, leading to the displacement of more than 100,000

[3] Check, do the pictures show recently demolished mosques in Oromia? 23 May 2023,https://shorter.me/laws

people, with 111 individuals arrested by the police forces.[4] On May 31, 2023, Ethiopian security forces clashed with mass demonstrations against the destruction of mosques near the "Anwar Shamal Mosque" in the Ethiopian capital, resulting in the arrest of 114 people.[5]

4- Right to Asylum

The right to asylum in Ethiopia faces significant challenges. Despite being the second-largest host of African refugees, with an estimated population of 966,200, Ethiopia has been unable to fully implement its new law on refugees, which was issued in January 2019. The country has also been unable to effectively implement the "outside the camps" policy that it has been attempting to follow since 2010. Additionally, refugees have not been granted work permits, as demonstrated by the experiences of Sudanese and Eritrean refugees.[6] Sudanese refugees are received in various camps, with the Comer refugee camp being the most well-known, where they lack basic services and humanitarian necessities for survival. There is insufficient food, clean water, healthcare services, and adequate toilet facilities.[7]

Regarding Eritrean refugees, Ethiopia's commitments towards them have diminished since the signing of the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2018. Tens of thousands of Eritrean refugees have been left in a legal limbo, with suspension of refugee registration, issuance of permits, or protection from conflict and civil war.[8] The peace agreement, despite the cessation of hostilities in Tigray, lacks specific provisions for the protection of Eritrean refugees, both in Tigray and other regions of Ethiopia, from forced return and access to humanitarian assistance. Consequently, they have become one of the most vulnerable populations in the Horn of Africa, caught between the oppression of their home country and aggressive measures to repatriate them.[9]

5- Right to Express Opinion

The right to express one's opinion in Ethiopia is guaranteed in theory under Article 29, but in practice, there are no policies in place for its effective implementation. **This can be observed by:**

- **Freedom of Media**

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4 Politics today, Demolishing Mosques in Ethiopia: Urbanization or Islamophobia? 21 June 2023, https://shorter.me/1ZiAr

5 ENA, Hate Speech, Misinformation on Social Media Forums "Very Concerning", Says Ethiopian Media Authority, Access date 24 January 2024, https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng_2951725

6 UNCHR, Ethiopia Refugee Crisis Explained, August 2023, https://urlis.net/58p2bkw6

7 The New Humanitarian, Sudan refugees struggle to exit to Ethiopia, while aid workers trying to enter are turned back, 7 June 2023, https://tinyurl.com/yf58zt2m

8 OWP, "We Don't Exist": Eritrean Refugee Conditions "Dire" With "No Sign Of Improvement," U.N. Says, 29 march 2023, http://rb.gy/c6tpj

9 UN, UN experts urge Ethiopia to halt mass deportation of Eritreans, 13 July 2023. http://rb.gy/vlzfc

The right to freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom of information, in Ethiopia is facing increasing violations. Since 2023, the Ethiopian government has been exerting regulatory pressure, using licensing issues and conditions as excuses to target the media. In January alone, authorities in the Somali region suspended 15 foreign media outlets, citing licensing concerns and referring to guidance from the European Medicines Agency.[10] In May, the government temporarily suspended the license of the Mahibere Kidusan T channel.[11] On July 17, the Ethiopia Insider website was hacked, resulting in a break-in where three cameras, a smartphone, four laptops, and six camera lenses were confiscated.[12]

- **Freedom of Press**

Journalists in Ethiopia continue to endure restrictions due to security concerns, government pressure, arrests, and threats of expulsion. This was particularly evident in 2023, especially in April when eight journalists were arrested, many of whom had written about issues affecting members of the Amhara ethnicity. Additionally, at least three journalists covering events in Amhara were arrested in separate incidents in Addis Ababa.[13] On August 10, the editor-in-chief of the Amara Media Center was arrested, and on August 26, a presenter on the electronic media platforms Yegna TV and Menelik Television was arrested while having a conversation with a friend at a café in Addis Ababa. On August 30, a political analyst and co-host of the program "Yegna Forum" was also arrested.[14]

Furthermore, on September 7, a reporter from the online news website Yabili Media, along with two co-founders and reporters from Ayyam Media, were arrested. On September 11, the program director of the privately owned Tirita 97.6 FM station was arrested without any specific reason being provided. Finally, on November 13, 2023, a journalist from Ethio News was arrested without any charges being filed.[15]

- **Right to Access Internet**

The right to freedom of opinion and expression, particularly through access to the Internet, is on the decline in Ethiopia. In addition to the limited Internet infrastructure, which only allows 20.8 million people to have access, leaving 104.1 million, or 83.3% of the population, unconnected, the

10 Monitor, Ethiopia bans 15 foreign media outlets, 15 February 2023, https://shorter.me/gEOy5

11 African News, 15 foreign media outlets banned in Ethiopia, 1 February 2023, https://tinyurl.com/bdenszzj

12 ALL Africa, Ethiopia: CPJ Calls for Swift and Credible Investigation into Burglary of Ethiopia Insider Office, https://tinyurl.com/2p8k93jh

13 CPJ, At least 8 journalists detained amid renewed unrest in Ethiopia, 14 April 2023, https://shorter.me/d2ELI

14 AS, Ethiopia's press freedom crisis: Arrests, exile of Journalists intensify amid political turmoil, 28 October 2023, https://tinyurl.com/2z7zr9wx

15 Gale Academic, Ethiopia: Three Ethiopian Journalists Beaten and Detained While Covering Protest in Tigray., 21 September 2023, https://tinyurl.com/ys3cehu5

Ethiopian government has repeatedly blocked and shut down the Internet[16] during periods of violent clashes, especially in 2023. For instance, in February, access to platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube was cut off by the government amid tensions within the country's Orthodox community. In April, the government shut down the Internet following an escalation of violence in the Amhara region, and in August, the Internet was cut off during a state of emergency.[17]

6- Right to Peaceful Assembly and Association

Ethiopia theoretically guarantees the right to peaceful assembly and association in its Constitution, but in practice, it imposes severe restrictions on these rights. This is particularly evident through the Civil Society Law of 2019, which imposes stringent limitations on the right to association, grants broad powers to the Federal Authority for Civil Society Organizations, and renders human rights non-governmental organizations unable to work legally without official approval.

In 2023, the state of emergency was the primary catalyst for violations of the rights to peaceful assembly and association, including incidents in January. Four employees of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council were arrested by the Ethiopian police and subjected to forced disappearance for several hours. Three of the human rights employees were released on bail, while in February, six people were killed by security authorities during protests regarding long-standing concerns about water supplies in the city of Wolket.

On September 10, the Joint Task Force, composed of various security sectors, including the Federal Police, announced the arrest of over 100 individuals who were accused of planning to "create chaos and disorder" during a planned anti-war campaign. In December, the Addis Ababa city administration prevented an anti-war demonstration and issued threats to its organizers.[18]

7- Gender-based Violence

Ethiopia faces a complex combination of security, climatic, and economic challenges, creating a fertile environment for an increase in violations of gender-based violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, discriminatory, and encompassing harmful practices and negative phenomena. **Within this context, the following instances of gender-based violence have been observed:**

- **Physical and Sexual Violence**

Incidents of physical and sexual violence are pervasive in Ethiopia. Statistics reveal that approximately 25 percent of girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49 have experienced

16 Data Portal, DIGITAL 2023: ETHIOPIA, February 2024, https://shorter.me/eiQUI

17 Access now, Preserving freedom in crisis: Ethiopia's internet shutdowns must not become the norm, 12 September 2023, https://shorter.me/QvyvG

18 RW, Ethiopia: EPO Weekly: 2-8 December 2023, December 2023, https://shorter.me/OKqsh

physical violence since the age of 15. Additionally, 10 percent of girls and Ethiopian women have been subjected to sexual violence, particularly in conflict-stricken areas. This alarming trend was further confirmed by reports indicating that at least 128 women and girls in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia were subjected to sexual violence, despite the signing of a peace agreement, according to November 2023 statistics.[19]

- **Harmful Traditional Practices**

Violations associated with harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation and cutting, continue to persist in Ethiopia. More than 65% of Ethiopian girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone genital mutilation, often justified under the pretext of controlling female sexuality.[20]

- **Child Marriage**

Ethiopia ranks among the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage globally, with over 15 million child brides, among whom 6 million are under the age of 15. Forty percent of young women in Ethiopia marry before the age of 18, and 14% marry before the age of 15, in contrast to 5% of boys. Legal loopholes contribute to the increasing rates of child marriage, allowing exemptions and exceptions for individuals to marry at the age of 16 based on self-submitted applications or applications submitted by their parents.[21]

Second: Social & Economic Rights

1- Right to Education

Violations of the right to education and the erosion of its quality are escalating in Ethiopia. The country faces one of the most severe educational crises worldwide and is categorized as one of the most educationally disadvantaged nations due to scarcity, conflicts, and crises. The education law does not currently mandate compulsory education, and there is a lack of sufficient schools to

19 AP, Scores of women and girls were sexually assaulted after peace deal in Ethiopia's Tigray, study shows, 2 August 2023, https://shorter.me/1lg95

20 UNICEF, Child marriage Child marriage threatens the lives, well-being and futures of girls around the world, Access date February 2024, https://shorter.me/CMRUJ

21 UNICEF, Child marriage Child marriage threatens the lives, well-being and futures of girls around the world, Access date February 2024, https://shorter.me/CMRUJ

accommodate all children.[22]

When considering the high enrollment rates, estimated at 88.7%, it is important to note that progression to subsequent stages is limited, with only 33.1% reaching secondary school. Furthermore, a concerning 90% of 10-year-old children lack basic reading and comprehension skills, and the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, and climate change has resulted in approximately 13 million children being out of school in Ethiopia. An additional estimated 3.5 million children, both in primary and secondary levels, face the risk of dropping out due to conflicts and climate-related disruptions. Over 8,700 schools in Ethiopia have suffered partial or severe damage, exacerbating the situation. Additionally, the student-to-teacher ratio widens to 1:39 at primary level.[23]

2- Right to Health

Ethiopia faces numerous violations and challenges to the right to health, stemming from geographical, institutional, administrative, financing, and healthcare-related factors. The country's health infrastructure and capacity to prevent and combat diseases such as malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis have been weakened. In 2023 alone, more than 4.1 million malaria cases were reported, with over 320,000 new cases since January 2024.[24]

Moreover, infant mortality rates stand at 63.25 cases per 1,000 live births, placing Ethiopia among the countries with the highest rates globally. Inadequate healthcare centers and professionals exacerbate the situation, and the country also bears the burden of a significant number of AIDS orphans, estimated at around 886,820 children in sub-Saharan Africa.[25]

3- Right to Food

Ethiopian environment poses significant challenges to economic and social rights, including the right to food. According to 2024 statistics, Ethiopia grapples with one of the highest hunger rates globally, with approximately 18% of the population experiencing food insecurity. Around 20.1

22 Canadian Feed, Chronically drought-prone, Ethiopia's agricultural productivity is compromised by the impacts of climate change and poverty, February 2024, https://canadianfeedthechildren.ca/where/ethiopia/

23 Relief Web, Increasing Number of Children Pushed Out of Education in Ethiopia Due to Severe Drought, Conflict and Forced Displacement, December 2023, https://shorter.me/zylk

24 RW, Ethiopia Health Cluster Bulletin (January 2024), February 2024, https://shorter.me/5fkle

25 UNICEF, For every child, nutrition!, access date February 2024, https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/every-child-nutrition

million Ethiopians require food assistance, including 7.4 million children and women. Children are particularly affected, with 40% (5.9 million children) under the age of five suffering from chronic malnutrition. Additionally, about 1.2 million children suffer from acute malnutrition.[26]

4- Right to Adequate Housing

The conflict-ridden environment in Ethiopia undermines efforts to ensure the right to adequate housing, resulting in increased violations, displacement, and forced displacement. The consequences of conflicts and strife in the Tigray region between 2020 and 2022 have been particularly severe. An estimated 4.5 million people were displaced in northern Ethiopia, specifically in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray regions.

Despite the cessation of hostilities in November 2022, approximately 1 million internally displaced persons remain in Tigray. Disproportionately, 34% of them reside in the northwest region, primarily in major cities such as Asjedi and Chiraru. In Afar, around 57,000 displaced individuals still reside in temporary shelters and camps. Furthermore, heavy rainfall has triggered additional displacement in Somalia, Gambella, southern Ethiopia, Afar, and Oromia regions, exacerbating the spread of diseases like cholera and malaria among the displaced populations who are forced to reside in inadequate, overcrowded, and unsanitary shelters.[27]

Recommendations

Following close monitoring of human rights in Ethiopia, particularly focusing on political, civil, social, and economic rights, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights presents a series of recommendations to Ethiopian government:

1. Maat urges the Ethiopian government to update and revise national legislation, policies, and programs. This will ensure compliance with international and regional human rights obligations, protect individuals, and enhance access to fair trials and remedies. Specific attention should be given to the 2019 civil society laws and the Media Law.
2. Maat recommends a reevaluation of government policies and attitudes towards journalists and media outlets. The release of political detainees, including journalists and human rights defenders, is crucial. Additionally, measures must be taken to protect journalists and human rights defenders from threats, attacks, reprisals, and intimidation.

[26] Action Against Hunger, Action Against Hunger conducts more malnutrition screenings in Ethiopia than ever before, 21 November 2023, https://shorter.me/und-E

[27] RW, Ethiopia Emergency Shelter and NFI Cluster 2023 Annual Report, 12 February 2024, https://shorter.me/-GJXV

3. Maat emphasizes the need for intensified efforts toward transitional justice. This includes conducting prompt investigations into existing human rights violations to hold perpetrators accountable, provide compensation to victims, and ensure access to remedies.
4. Maat calls for upgrades to the capabilities of security and legal institutions. Training for members on activating and preventing human rights violations is essential.
5. Maat highlights the need for expanded partnerships with civil society organizations, particularly those focused on combating gender-based violence. Collaboration can activate awareness-raising and educational initiatives regarding the dangers of early marriage, female genital mutilation, and support services for victims of sexual and physical violence.
6. Maat urges the Ethiopian government to prioritize its obligations and pledges to refugees. Efforts should focus on facilitating movement out of camps, improving living conditions, and meeting essential humanitarian needs, with particular attention to Eritrean and Sudanese refugees.
7. Maat recommends the localization of monitoring and early warning systems for environmental, climate, and health disasters. This will allow for proactive identification of risks and challenges, enabling the formulation of effective humanitarian response plans, particularly for the most vulnerable populations such as children, refugees, and indigenous peoples.
8. To address the needs of all Ethiopians on an equal basis, Maat recommends investment in social and economic safety and protection networks. This includes launching aid programs.