



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, 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.

[19 May 2024]

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



## **The Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian government and its allied militias are still engaging in severe and extensive violations of basic human rights. Despite the government has signed a peace agreement with the Tigray People's Liberation Front to stop hostilities, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association has continued to document various testimonies of arbitrary practices that contradict international human rights standards, including the international agreements endorsed by the Ethiopian government. These practices included extrajudicial killings, murder outside the judiciary, violation of the right to life, as well as arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment; and restrictions imposed on freedom of the press and media.

### **First: Extrajudicial execution and violation of the right to life:-**

According to various testimonies, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association documented cases of extrajudicial executions that led to the killing of more than 50 civilians from January until the end of February 2024 through illegal attacks in which Ethiopia used drones. Most of these executions were conducted summarily and arbitrarily(1). For instance, on February 2, 2024, the Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association recorded the killing of 50 civilians in the town of Merawi in the Amhara region. Ethiopian forces failed to uphold the protection guaranteed to civilians under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the right to life as outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Ethiopia ratified on 11 June 1993(2). Testimonies obtained by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association revealed that among the victims were a six-year-old child, a 75-year-old man, and a pregnant woman in her sixth month, none of whom survived. The attacks specifically targeted civilians in their homes and on the streets, resulting in immediate fatalities. Despite calls for Ethiopia to conduct a fair investigation into these extrajudicial executions and unlawful killings, impunity prevailed, and Ethiopia showed no willingness to hold the perpetrators accountable. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association sees it crucial to compel Ethiopia to refrain from using security measures as a pretext for killing civilians and to ensure the protection of civilians during conflicts and periods of tension. In a related context, the prominent Ethiopian opposition politician B.O. was found dead on 10 April 2024, with gunshot wounds. He was 41 years old and a prominent member of the Oromo Liberation Front. According to the death report, his family claimed that the people who took him from his hotel room to the site where he killed was were the government security forces, which may have made them involved in his killing(3).

### **Second: Arbitrary detention and fair trial guarantees:-**

The Ethiopian government's extension of the state of emergency in the Amhara region in February 2024 has enabled security forces to take steps, including mass arrests without judicial authorization, including against opposition figures in Addis Ababa. People have been detained at times in unofficial places such as schools used for military purposes since the beginning of the conflict. The state of emergency grants wide powers to security forces to arrest suspects without a court order, impose curfews, and ban public gatherings. Estimates indicate the arrest and detention of more than 1000 people across Ethiopia under this law(4). One example of these clear practices is the detention of 13 people in connection with the killing of Ethiopian Politician B.U. (5). Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association observed a prevalent pattern of arbitrary detention in particular among young people in Addis Ababa. They were not allowed to communicate with their families, nor did they communicate with their appointed defense lawyer, and their place of detention was often not disclosed, making the fate of some unknown. Law enforcement agencies often detained youth based on their ethnicity and alleged affiliation with the Fano group loyal to the Amhara, without real evidence, under the pretext of security operations.

These arrests are often made without judicial orders and based on vague charges, contributing to a climate of fear. The constitution and the law require judicial authorization for arrest, and detainees must appear before a court and face charges within 48 hours of arrest or as soon as possible thereafter when circumstances permit(6).

### **Third: Torture and ill-treatment:-**

Ethiopia is a state party to the Convention against Torture since 1993. This requires prohibiting all practices that amount to torture, including ill-treatment, degrading and cruel treatment. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association has concerns because the security forces have often practiced torture as a tool to extract confessions and have not adhered to international standards aimed at preventing torture. The crime of torture is still not included in local legislation as a specific crime with a definition that is consistent with the definition of torture contained in Article 1 of the Convention. According to testimonies reviewed by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, the victims were beaten with electric cables, held incommunicado, and threatened with beatings using batons. They were deprived of food and water, in contravention of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Testimonies included that civilians in the western Tigray region were subjected to torture and ill-treatment due to considerations based on race(7).

### **Fourth: Freedom of the press and media:-**

The Ethiopian Constitution stipulates freedom of expression. However, Ethiopia came in a lagging position in the World Press Freedom Index for the year 2024, as it ranked 141 out of 180 countries included in the index, which is a decline of about 11 places from 2023, as it ranked 130 in the same index during the year 2023. Despite the new media law adopted in 2021 that abolished the crime of defamation, this abolition has not been implemented in reality. Security forces have circumvented the law, and 15 journalists in Ethiopia have remained arbitrarily detained since May 2022 due to opinions they expressed regarding the abusive practices against the Amhara ethnic group(8). The practice of arresting Ethiopian journalists has not only continued but has expanded to include foreign journalists "A. J," a journalist working for the Africa Intelligence platform based in Paris, was arrested during an interview with a spokesperson for the opposition Oromo Liberation Front, in a hotel(9). This fundamentally contradicts Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations' action plan on the safety of journalists and impunity. In a related context, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association notes the weak numbers of printed newspapers published in Ethiopia and the lack of distribution of existing newspapers except in the main cities. Although the Ethiopian Constitution guarantees freedom of the media and freedom of expression on social media, the institutions concerned with communications have imposed restrictions on access to the Internet and social media platforms, and at various times in 2023 and the first three months of 2024, the government restricted access to platforms including Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube in light of the prevailing tensions between ethnic groups. This prompted Ethiopians to access VPNs to use social media without restrictions.

### **Recommendations:-**

1. The need to immediately put an end to arbitrary arrests and detentions in Ethiopia, and ensure that any person arrested is immediately charged based on credible evidence.
2. Urgent and immediate investigation into the murder of political oppositionist B.U., who was found murdered in April 2024.
3. Integration of all ethnic groups into Ethiopia's political and social framework. Ending all unfair practices and fostering dialogue to address the underlying causes of racial conflict in Addis Ababa and beyond.

4. Establishing an independent mechanism to oversee prisons, detention centers, or unofficial prisons to prevent the mistreatment and torture of detainees and to guarantee the unimpeded access of independent civil society organizations to detention centers without prior coordination.
5. Amending Article 424 of the Criminal Law to ensure a complete alignment of the definition of torture with the first article of the Convention against Torture.
6. Considering the approval of a visit by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to Ethiopia as soon as possible.

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- (1) Over 50 civilians killed in Merawi, Ethiopia Observer, <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2024/02/02/over-50-civilians-killed-in-merawi/>
  - (2) Ratification, Reporting & Documentation for Ethiopia, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx)
  - (3) Ethiopian opposition figure shot dead, <https://tinyurl.com/bde5v22h>
  - (4) Ethiopia: Deteriorating human rights situation, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-deteriorating-human-rights-situation>
  - (5) 13 arrested in Ethiopia over killing of Oromo opposition figure, <https://www.voanews.com/a/arrested-in-ethiopia-over-killing-of-oromo-opposition-figure/7567191.html>
  - (6) Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Ethiopia, <https://tinyurl.com/4p278r9m>
  - (8) Ethiopia, Reporters Without Borders, <https://tinyurl.com/4ujutz74>
  - (9) Ethiopia Arrests French Journalist, <https://www.voanews.com/a/ethiopia-arrests-french-journalist/7503470.html>