

ETHIOPIA

Dozens of primary, secondary, and university students were killed or injured, along with hundreds arrested, during the government's response to student protests in Ethiopia. Many of these students were members of the Oromo ethnic group. Government personnel also intimidated and arrested university professors and primary and secondary school teachers in connection with the government's counterprotest efforts.

Context

In 2014, due to their fear of displacement, members of the Oromo ethnic group began protesting the Ethiopian government's announced "Master Plan" to expand Addis Ababa into surrounding towns in the Oromia region.⁸²⁷ Protests decreased in early 2015 before surging in November of that year and continuing into late 2016, with a broad geographic scope both within and outside Oromia.⁸²⁸

Government security forces responded to peaceful protesters, many of whom were students, with live ammunition and other violent means, killing dozens and arresting thousands.⁸²⁹ Government-affiliated personnel reportedly threatened and harassed human rights activists, journalists, teachers, and others whose publications and teaching activities were perceived to align with the Oromo protests.⁸³⁰ The government cancelled the Master Plan in January 2016, but the protests continued.⁸³¹

In October 2016, Ethiopia's government declared a state of emergency, due to instability caused by the protests. The measure, initially planned to last six months but extended by another four, restricted freedom of expression, association, and assembly and gave the police significant authority in responding to protests.⁸³² The state of emergency officially ended on August 4, 2017.⁸³³ Protests began again soon after the state of emergency was lifted and continued through 2017, with clashes between security forces and local community members leaving at least 18 people dead on September 12, 2017, alone.⁸³⁴

Arrests made as part of government efforts to prevent further protests affected students and teachers, along with opposition politicians, health workers, and others who assisted fleeing protesters.⁸³⁵ According to the government's own figures, at least 21,000 people, the majority of them students, were arrested during the 10 months of the state of emergency as part of the government's crackdown on opposition.⁸³⁶ The government temporarily closed schools throughout the Oromia region between 2015 and 2016, for weeks in some locations, in order to dissuade protests, because parents did not allow their children to go to class for fear of arrest, and because, in some locations, teachers had been arrested.⁸³⁷ Some schools and universities remained closed throughout the Oromia region until at least February 2016.⁸³⁸

Due to the scale and violence of the response to protests in Oromia, the number of students at all levels who were arrested or otherwise targeted between 2013 and 2017 increased significantly over the 2009-2013 reporting period. Reports of attacks on education decreased from late 2016 through the end of 2017, but this may have resulted from limitations on reporting and journalism during the state of emergency.⁸³⁹

Attacks on schools

GCPEA found one report of an attack on a school in Ethiopia during the reporting period. On September 6, 2017, a grenade was thrown into a school in Meiso, Harar, in eastern Ethiopia, injuring four students. News sources reported that local residents believed the Somali region's Liya police were responsible and that the grenade was retaliation for the killing of members of the police force by members of the Oromo community the week before.⁸⁴⁰

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Throughout the reporting period, government security forces arrested, killed, and injured hundreds of students and teachers in the context of protests. These incidents occurred at schools, in classrooms, and at home. Attacks on students and teachers were more frequently reported than they had been from 2009 to 2013, mainly due to the heightened instability caused by the protests and the state's response. Attacks on students and teachers began during the protests in 2014 and decreased slightly at the beginning of 2015. They peaked later in the year when the government response

to opposition intensified, lasting from November 2015 to February 2016 and beyond. When the state of emergency was in effect, from October 2016 to August 2017, reports of protests decreased.

On April 25, 2014, students began demonstrating throughout Oromia in response to the announcement of the Master Plan.⁸⁴¹ In responding to these protests throughout that year, government security forces killed dozens of primary and secondary school student protesters and injured many more by using live ammunition, teargas, and other means.⁸⁴² For example, on May 2, 2014, international media reported that government security forces killed between 9 and 11 students of unknown ages during protests in Ambo, Alem Maya, and Bidire.⁸⁴³

Amnesty International reported that, in the aftermath of the protests in October 2014, large numbers of suspected dissenters were arrested, including several hundred students, farmers, and other residents of the Hurumu and Yayu districts.⁸⁴⁴ Amnesty International also received reports that students who asked about the fate of their arrested classmates, demanding their release and justice for those killed, were also arrested.⁸⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch found that an unknown number of Oromo students involved in the 2014 protests remained in detention in 2015, many without being charged.⁸⁴⁶ Among the approximately 30 former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch, most alleged that they were tortured or ill-treated while in detention.⁸⁴⁷

From 2014 to 2015, attacks on and detention of students and teachers in Oromia often followed a similar pattern. According to Human Rights Watch, during the evenings after protests, government security forces arrested students while raiding their homes and interrogated them about who was organizing students.⁸⁴⁸ Most students arrested were boys, but Human Rights Watch found that the youngest student detained was a 6-year-old girl.⁸⁴⁹ Many of the students arrested were released from detention after several weeks, although some were detained for several months and many remained in detention throughout the 2013-2017 reporting period.⁸⁵⁰ The arrested students reported to Human Rights Watch that they had been tortured and beaten while in detention. Four students interviewed said they received electric shocks, and two stated that they had weights tied to their testicles, which was also an act of sexual violence, as noted below.⁸⁵¹

Protest-related violence decreased in early 2015 and then peaked again late in the year. According to a local NGO called the Human Rights Council (HRCO), between November 2015 and February 20, 2016, government security forces killed at least 16 children between the ages of 12 and 18 while responding to protests.⁸⁵² On November 12, 2015, after a lull in the violence, authorities began clearing a forest and a football field for an investment project in Ginchi, which reignited protests by primary and secondary school students against the Master Plan and against the government's response to the protests.⁸⁵³ Dozens of students and at least one teacher were reportedly harmed in the following incidents in late 2015:

- On December 6, 2015, government security forces shot and killed a 19-year-old 9th-grade student in Haromaya Town, Oromia region, according to HRCO.⁸⁵⁴ The motivation for the shooting was unclear.
- Government security forces shot and injured a 19-year-old woman in the 8th grade in Babich Town on December 10, 2015, also as reported by HRCO.⁸⁵⁵ The reasons for the attack were unknown.
- In mid-December 2015, according to Human Rights Watch, Oromia local police entered a school near Shashemene and arrested four students. When other students protested, the police left. They returned with federal police and then shot and killed three students. The following morning, 20 students from the same school were arrested.⁸⁵⁶
- On late December 2015, 50 students from one school joined other students in a peaceful protest, which was met with teargas. Soldiers and police reportedly beat some students and threw some in the back of trucks, according to students who recounted the incident to Human Rights Watch.⁸⁵⁷
- A teacher in Arsi was detained in December 2015 and threatened with death if his students continued to protest, according to his account to Human Rights Watch.⁸⁵⁸
- Student witnesses reported to Human Rights Watch that government security forces had hung detained student protesters upside down and beaten them in at least two incidents in December 2015.⁸⁵⁹

These protest trends continued at a similar rate into early 2016, before decreasing in the second half of the year and into 2017, although arrests continued to be widespread. The state of emergency was imposed from October 2016 to August 2017, which likely prevented some protests from occurring.⁸⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch reported that there were dozens

of further incidents in the first half of 2016 in which government security forces entered schools in Oromia and Amhara and injured, harassed, or killed students and teachers.⁸⁶¹ For example:

- Human Rights Watch found that, in January 2016, government security forces shot at least six students in Bedeno in the East Hararghe zone, Oromia.⁸⁶²
- The same source found that, in February 2016, government security forces shot three students who were protesting in East Hararghe, Oromia. Two of them died from their wounds.⁸⁶³

Military use of schools and universities

Military use of schools and universities by national armed forces that was reported in 2015 and 2016 took place in the context of the government response to protests. Human Rights Watch found that, during the 2015 protests, government security forces occupied at least four school and university campuses, including classrooms, to prevent students from organizing and protesting. In some cases this prevented classes from taking place.⁸⁶⁴ The same source reported that classes took place with plainclothes security officers present in at least three cases.⁸⁶⁵ Several students claimed that government security forces used their classrooms as makeshift detention centers, but Human Rights Watch was unable to verify these allegations.⁸⁶⁶ In December 2015, according to Human Rights Watch, students at Ambo University protested the occupation of their campus by government security forces.⁸⁶⁷

Reports of military use of schools and universities continued but were less frequent in 2016 and 2017. For example:

- Human Rights Watch reported an incident on an unknown date in June 2016, when the Liyu police used a local school as a detention center during an operation to disarm the local population.⁸⁶⁸
- *Borkena Ethiopian News* reported in November 2017 that security forces had been deployed at Alamaya University in southeastern Ethiopia following ethnic tensions on campus. Students were demanding the withdrawal of security forces.⁸⁶⁹

Sexual violence by armed parties at, or en route to or from, school or university

GCEPA found one report of sexual violence against students or in schools and universities during the reporting period. The above-mentioned incident reported to Human Rights Watch of two students having weights tied to their testicles constituted sexual violence, as well as torture.⁸⁷⁰

Child recruitment at, or en route to or from, school

According to Human Rights Watch, several students were forcibly recruited into the Liyu police in the Somali region in 2013 and 2014. In two other separate incidents, Liyu police went to local schools and pressured students to join, asserting that if they didn't they would be seen as opposing the government.⁸⁷¹

Attacks on higher education

Attacks on higher education appeared to increase in the 2013-2017 reporting period over the 2009-2013 period. Throughout the current reporting period, government security forces killed, injured, and arrested university students in response to protests. There was a peak in 2015 and early 2016 in conjunction with the rising level of protests across the country and the violent government response. GCEPA found reports of two cases of attacks on higher education in both 2013 and 2014. The number rose to 15 in 2015, including at least 13 in December, and in January 2016 alone there were three attacks on higher education. Dozens of students were injured, arrested, and detained in these attacks, with the violence primarily targeting Oromo students.

At least two incidents of arrests of multiple university students occurred in 2013, which included one at Addis Ababa University and the other at Arba Minch University in the south of Ethiopia.⁸⁷²

- Scholars at Risk found that an Addis Ababa University student was arrested on campus on March 28, 2013, after expressing concern via Facebook about alleged corruption among Arba Minch University officials and city administrators. The student was subsequently charged with criminal defamation.⁸⁷³

- Local news reported in May 2013 that police surrounded the campus of Arba Minch University and detained at least 100 students for allegedly organizing a protest about education-related grievances.⁸⁷⁴

As in the case of primary and secondary education, violent responses to protests at the university level continued in Oromia into 2014, after the announcement of the Master Plan. GCPEA collected information on two such incidents:

- Scholars at Risk found that on April 30, 2014, police fired live ammunition at a group of student protesters at Ambo University in Ambo, Oromia, killing at least nine people.⁸⁷⁵
- According to Amnesty International, 27 students were reportedly arrested in late November 2014 at Wollega University in Nekemte, Western Oromia, after asking about classmates arrested during the 2014 protests.⁸⁷⁶

During the 2015 protests, when violence against students and other protesters increased over previous years, soldiers and police arrested, injured, and killed dozens of students from university campuses and other locations, mainly in the Oromia region. Human Rights Watch reported such violence in the cities of Ambo, Adama, Jimma, and Haramaya in the Oromia region, and in other locations throughout the country.⁸⁷⁷ The US State Department found similarly that the Ethiopian government surveilled and detained students at Oromia University throughout the year.⁸⁷⁸ Detentions, beatings, and killings that targeted university students in 2015 included the following:

- Government security forces detained 20 university students after a peaceful protest in Addis Ababa on March 8, 2015. According to Human Rights Watch, they were charged with “inciting the public through false rumors” under both the Criminal Code and the Peaceful Demonstration and Public Political Meeting Procedure Proclamation, including for their protest of military use of schools.⁸⁷⁹ It was unclear whether they were sentenced.
- Government forces killed three student protesters in Addis Ababa in December 2015, as reported by Scholars at Risk and *Al Jazeera*. Local activists told the latter source that there were seven casualties across the Oromia region.⁸⁸⁰
- On an unknown day in December 2015, government security forces entered a Jimma University dormitory and asked students to identify their Oromo companions. Those identified were beaten and some were arrested, according to Human Rights Watch.⁸⁸¹
- Government security forces entered classrooms at Rift Valley University in Waliso, Oromia region, on approximately 10 different occasions in December 2015, shooting and killing at least one student and arresting several others, as documented by Human Rights Watch.⁸⁸²
- HRCO reported that government security forces shot and killed a 25-year-old student at Ambo College in the Oromia region during a demonstration in Muger Town on December 17, 2015.⁸⁸³
- Unidentified assailants threw a hand grenade at students at Dilla University in Oromia, killing two students and injuring six others, according to media reports.⁸⁸⁴

This crackdown on protesters continued into January 2016 before the violence subsided later in the year. For example:

- As students continued to protest in the early days of January 2016, local media reported that government security forces shot and killed a student at Adama University, Oromia region.⁸⁸⁵
- Human Rights Watch reported that on January 10, 2016, government security forces threw a grenade at students at Jimma University in the Oromia region, injuring dozens.⁸⁸⁶
- On January 10 and 11, 2016, government security forces stormed the Jimma University dormitories, where they arrested and beat Oromo students.⁸⁸⁷

At the time of writing, reports of students being targeted during protests had not been found since the beginning of the state of emergency, and no further attacks on higher education were reported. This could have been due to restrictions on access, media, and other independent reporting, and it was possible that more incidents occurred but were not reported for these reasons.

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- ⁸²⁹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2016*, Ethiopia chapter. “UN experts urge Ethiopia to halt violent crackdown on Oromia protesters, ensure accountability for abuses,” OHCHR news release, January 21, 2016.
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- ⁸³¹ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” p. 2.
- ⁸³² Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” pp. 19-20. “Ethiopia: State of Emergency Risks New Abuses,” Human Rights Watch news release, October 31, 2016. *Reuters*, “Ethiopia Declares State of Emergency After Violent Protests,” *New York Times*, October 9, 2016. “Ethiopia extends state of emergency by four months,” *Al Jazeera*, March 30, 2017. Paul Schemm, “Despite outward calm, Ethiopia extends state of emergency,” *Washington Post*, March 30, 2017.
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- ⁸³⁷ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” pp. 3, 43.
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- ⁸⁴⁴ Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2014/2015: Ethiopia*, p. 151.
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- ⁸⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” p. 17.
- ⁸⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” pp. 29-37.
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- ⁸⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” pp. 36-37.
- ⁸⁵² HRCO, *140th Special Report*, pp. 5-13.
- ⁸⁵³ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” pp. 1-2, 13. HRCO, *140th Special Report*, p. 5.
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- ⁸⁵⁵ HRCO, *140th Special Report*, p. 17.
- ⁸⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” p. 26.
- ⁸⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” pp. 21-22.
- ⁸⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” p. 44.
- ⁸⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” pp. 36, 38-39.
- ⁸⁶⁰ “Never Again?”
- ⁸⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” pp. 3, 26.
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⁸⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” p. 28.

⁸⁸⁰ Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Haramaya University, December 5, 2015. Ademo, “Students protesting.”

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⁸⁸² Human Rights Watch, “*Such a Brutal Crackdown*,” p. 32.

⁸⁸³ HRCO, *140th Special Report*, p. 6.

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⁸⁸⁶ “Ethiopia: No Let Up.”

⁸⁸⁷ “Ethiopia: No Let Up.”