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. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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.

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Among the approximately 30 former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch, most alleged that they were tortured or ill-treated while in detention.

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. Most students arrested were boys, but Human Rights Watch found that the youngest student detained was a 6-year-old girl. 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. 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.

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 2016, government security forces killed at least 16 children between the ages of 12 and 18 while responding to protests. 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. 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. 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. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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. 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. 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. 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.

**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. The same source reported that classes took place with plainclothes security officers present in at least three cases. Several students claimed that government security forces used their classrooms as makeshift detention centers, but Human Rights Watch was unable to verify these allegations. In December 2015, according to Human Rights Watch, students at Ambo University protested the occupation of their campus by government security forces.

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.

- *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.

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

GCPEA 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.

**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.

**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. GCPEA 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:

- 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.
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.\textsuperscript{876}

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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{877} The US State Department found similarly that the Ethiopian government surveilled and detained students at Oromia University throughout the year.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{886}
- On January 10 and 11, 2016, government security forces stormed the Jimma University dormitories, where they arrested and beat Oromo students.\textsuperscript{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.
extends state of emergency," 


"Ethiopia: No Let Up."


HRCO, 140th Special Report, p. 10.

HRCO, 140th Special Report, p. 17.


Human Rights Watch, "Such a Brutal Crackdown," p. 44.


"Never Again?"


Human Rights Watch, "Such a Brutal Crackdown," pp. 43-44.

Human Rights Watch, "Such a Brutal Crackdown," p. 27.


Information provided by Human Rights Watch researchers, October 27, 2017.


Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Ambo University, April 30, 2014.

882 Human Rights Watch, “Such a Brutal Crackdown,” p. 32.
883 HRCO, 140th Special Report, p. 6.
885 “Police kill a university student in Adama, three killed in East Hararghe as protest intensifies in Ethiopia,” ESAT News, January 5, 2016.
886 “Ethiopia: No Let Up.”
887 “Ethiopia: No Let Up.”