



INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ROUNDTABLE

April XX, 2024

The Honorable Cory Booker
Chairman
Senate Subcommittee on Africa
and Global Health Policy
717 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tim Scott
Ranking Member
Senate Subcommittee on Africa
and Global Health Policy
104 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

cc:
The Honorable Ben Cardin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

cc:
The Honorable Jim Risch
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
483 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Urgent Appeal: Religious Persecution of Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia

Dear Chairman Booker and Ranking Member Scott,

We, a collective of 70 religious and secular leaders, human rights advocates, and concerned individuals, urgently bring to your attention the escalating religious persecution faced by Orthodox Christian believers in Ethiopia. With over 52 million adherents, Ethiopia's rich Christian heritage is under threat, demanding immediate attention and action.

In recent years, Orthodox Christians have experienced increasing persecution, discrimination, and violence, particularly in the past six years.¹ Reports reveal targeted attacks by extremist groups, including factions within the Ethiopian Federal Army, resulting in atrocities such as forced displacement, mass arrests, and systematic massacres.² The rise in religious tensions poses a grave concern, especially considering Ethiopia's historical peaceful coexistence between Christian and Muslim communities.³

The heinous crimes, motivated by anti-Orthodox sentiment, include attacks on churches, clergy, and congregants, leading to loss of life and destruction of religious sites. Government forces' lack of intervention raises questions about complicity or negligence. Specific incidents, like the 2019 Shashemene massacre and the Burayu massacre, highlight the brutality faced by Orthodox Christians

¹ *Ethiopia: Military Assault on a Bastion of Orthodoxy*. European Centre for Law and Justice. (2023, July 21). <https://eclj.org/religious-freedom/un/ethiopie--570-victimes-dans-lattaque-dun-monastere-orthodoxe>

² Magango, S. (2017, December 17). *Ethiopia: Violence in Amhara Region*. OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/11/ethiopia-violence-amhara-region>

³ France-Presse, A. (2023, February 5). *Three killed in attacks on Ethiopian Orthodox Church, according to report*. Voice of America. <https://www.voanews.com/a/three-killed-in-attacks-on-ethiopian-orthodox-church-report-/6948447.html>

from various ethnic groups.

The perpetrators identify Orthodox Christians through visible symbols, such as crosses, leading to savagely executed beheadings. Christian religious leaders are abused, killed, and their families subjected to unspeakable atrocities. Churches are burned, treasures destroyed, and literary works obliterated.

Approximately 30 Orthodox churches have been attacked since July 2018, with more than half burned down. Tragically, church members have lost their lives while attempting to protect their places of worship. Coordinated attacks intensified following the assassination of Oromo singer Hachallu Hundessa, resulting in the deaths of over 36 Orthodox Christians in November 2023.

Religious institutions like Debre Elias Monastery and Zequala Abune Gebre Menfes Kidus Monastery have also faced assaults, threatening Ethiopia's rich religious heritage. The brutal killing of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church pilgrims near Dire Dawa further illustrates the severity of the situation.⁴

Furthermore, systemic discrimination and marginalization against Orthodox Christians persist, with interference in religious practices and denial of fundamental rights, perpetuating division within Ethiopian society. The government's recent measures, including interference in church governance, have fueled tensions, leading to violence, arrests, and job losses for those opposing breakaway Archbishops.⁵

Government restrictions on Orthodox Christian celebrations and attempts to dispossess historical places of worship further undermine religious coexistence.⁶ The government's actions pose a serious threat to peace and stability, fostering division instead of tolerance.

We implore you, as members of the United States Congress, to use your influence to advocate for the rights of Orthodox believers in Ethiopia. We urge you to work with the IRF Roundtable's Africa Working Group to formulate and introduce a House Resolution for an international independent investigation into the atrocities mentioned above leading to accountability, prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes against Orthodox Christians and eventual sanctions can be realized. We believe a hearing into the abuses in Ethiopia is appropriate to further investigate these crimes against humanity.

Your attention to this urgent matter is crucial. We look forward to working with you to take the necessary steps to address these abuses and work towards a future where all Ethiopians can coexist in peace.

Sincerely,

⁴ AfricaNews (2023, February 16). *Ethiopian Orthodox Church says internal crisis over after dissidents apologise*. Africanews. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/02/16/ethiopian-orthodox-church-says-internal-crisis-over-after-dissidents-apologise/>

⁵ Jeffrey, J. (2020, February 14). *Ethiopia's churches are being targeted – and no one is quite sure why*. Catholic Herald. <https://catholicherald.co.uk/ethiopias-churches-are-being-targeted-and-no-one-is-quite-sure-why/>

⁶ *Gunmen Target Ethiopian Orthodox Pilgrims Returning from an Annual Feast*. Orthodoxy Cognate Page. (2024, January 1). <https://ocpsociety.org/gunmen-target-ethiopian-orthodox-pilgrims-returning-from-an-annual-feast/>

ORGANIZATIONS

Advocates for Faith and Justice in Vietnam (AFJV)

American Association of Evangelicals

American Ethiopian Public Affairs Committee (AEPAC)

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

Coptic Solidarity

CRAN - Observatoire du racisme anti Noir en Suisse

Ethio Beteseb Media

Ethiopian American Civic Council (EACC)

Ethiopian American Development Council (EADC)

Ethiopian Tribune

Ex Muslims of North America

FIACONA

Foundations for Human Rights and Development in Ethiopia (FHRDE)

Global Amhara Coalition (GAC)

Hope for Ethiopia (HOPE)

In Defense of Christians

Indigenous Ministries International

Jubilee Campaign

Katartismos Global

Law & Liberty Trust

Orthodox Church of Kazakhstan

Peaceful Planet Human Rights Education

Save the Persecuted Christians

Stop Amhara Genocide

The Washington Times Foundation

Universal Peace Federation

WidowsAndOrphans.info

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