



Genocide Watch  
The Alliance Against Genocide

## Ethiopia: Genocide Warning July 2020

Ethnic divisions in Ethiopia date to the 1880s when the Amhara kingdom invaded its southern neighbors, creating the boundaries of modern Ethiopia. European powers supported Ethiopian Emperor Menelik (1889 – 1913) with weapons, military advisors, and diplomatic recognition. Emperor Haile Selassie I (1916 – 1974) made Amharic the official language, though only 27 percent of Ethiopians are Amhara. Oromos constitute one third of the population, but they held no political power until [Abiy Ahmed](#) became Prime Minister in 2018. Eritrea fought for independence for years and finally seceded in 1993. The Ogadeni Somali in eastern Ethiopia also seek secession.

Ethiopia has long been home to Beta Israel, a Falasha Jewish community that dates back to the sixth century. Ethiopian Jews were persecuted under the Ethiopian empire. Many left Ethiopia for Israel in the 1980's. Those who remain face discrimination.

In 1974, the Derg, a Marxist-Leninist military junta, seized control of the country and systematically implemented genocidal killings of political rivals. The Derg abolished parliament, arrested Emperor Haile Selassie I, who died in custody, and suspended the constitution. The Derg was backed by the Soviet Union. The Derg's "Red Terror" [murdered over 500,000](#) Ethiopian citizens, especially targeting the intelligentsia, who were suspected of joining resistance movements. Mass graves continue to be discovered today. In 2006 the Ethiopian Supreme Court convicted Derg leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam of genocide (*in absentia*) and sentenced him to death. Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe, then under Robert Mugabe, where he remains.

The Derg was overthrown by the [Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front](#) (EPRDF) in 1991. The EPRDF was dominated by ethnic Tigrayans. Under Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the EPRDF committed genocide against the Anuak people of Gambella province in 2003, the Somalis of the Ogaden, and other minority groups. In 2018, an Oromo, Abiy Ahmed, became Prime Minister. He negotiated an end to hostilities with Eritrea and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019.

In 2019, Amnesty International released [a report](#) implicating the country's security forces in extrajudicial killings of 39 people in Oromia. The report also accused security forces of standing by while 130 people were killed in ethnic clashes between Amhara and Qimant communities in the Amhara state.

In early July 2020, security forces arrested several members of the Oromo opposition party and critics of Prime Minister Abiy after an estimated 239 people died in protests surrounding the murder of Hachalu Hundessa, a popular Oromo singer. Most of the victims belonged to the Amhara ethnic group. The government shut down the internet and the Oromo Media Network TV station for two weeks.

Since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's election, over one million people have been displaced due to ethnic violence. Tigrayans in the Amhara and Oromia regions claim that other ethnic groups have looted and destroyed Tigrayan businesses and homes. Prime Minister Ahmed fired many Tigrayan ex-officials on corruption charges, which Tigrayans see as ethnic persecution. In the South, persecution by the Oromo Liberation Front has forced ethnic Gedeos to flee from West Guji. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, [The Prime Minister's term](#) has been extended and elections are postponed until after the pandemic.

Genocide Watch is issuing a Genocide Warning for Ethiopia due to the government's inaction to stop ethnically motivated violence between Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan and Gedeo peoples.

Genocide Watch considers Ethiopia at **Stage 6: Polarization** according to our [Ten Stages of Genocide](#).