

# **The Alarming Dehumanizing Conditions Obtaining in the Awash Arba Military Camp & the Plight of Amara Prisoners of Conscience Held there**

**Translation from Amharic into English**

**by**

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The Awash Arba military camp<sup>1</sup> is located 214 kms south east of Addis Ababa. This place is close to the Awash River and is surrounded by wild animals and unmarked graves. The temperature at this place can exceed 47 degrees Celsius. This place is currently a center where Amara prisoners dotted in every nook and crannies of

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<sup>1</sup> - What is now the Awash Arba military camp was initially set up as a camp for a German construction company called TRAPP which constructed the 300 kms long Awash-Tendaho highway during the imperial regime before 1974. Later this camp was used by the defunct dictatorial military regime known as the Dergue as a military camp. After the seizure of power by the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (that ruled Ethiopia between 1991-2018), this camp was used as a detention and torture center by the Tigrean fascist regime. In the 2005 election particularly the opposition political group the Coalition for Democracy and Unity (CDU) scored significant electoral victory at the polling stations in Addis Ababa (AA). When votes were rigged, that provoked a huge protest in AA. The fascistic Tigrean regime (TPLF) took revenge on the youth of Addis Ababa who protested against the vote rigging by incarcerating the AA youth at Awash Arba prison. The Addis Ababa youth were taken to this horrible place and subjected to physical and psychological torture.

Both the incumbent Oromo regime and its predecessor the TPLF are inspired by a fascist ideology premised on radical ultra-nationalism and social Darwinist thoughts. Like its predecessor the TPLF regime, the incumbent regime has continued the practice of using this hellish place as a torture and killing center where many Amaras are warehoused.

Ethiopia are locked up under the State of Emergency Law that is euphemistically peddled as Law Enforcement (**ህግ ማስከበር**) by the incumbent government and the media it monopolistically controls. The prisoner who related the following testimony was captured in August 2023 under the State of Emergency Law (SEL). Officially, the SEL has been imposed on the people living in the Amara regional state by the incumbent regime. The SEL has made it easier and legally justifiable to harass Amaras who live not only in the so-called Amara regional state but also on all Amaras who live in all parts of Ethiopia. The ex-prisoner gave the following interview upon his release from this notoriously dehumanizing prison. I have taken the liberty to translate the recorded interview from Amharic language into English. I have done this in order to bring to light the plight of millions of Amaras who for the last 10 months have been officially subjected to an all-out, full-scale war. This genocidal war is exacting heavy toll on Amaras on a daily basis. I have to rewind the tape recorded interview several times in order to convey the message this ex-prisoner wanted to get across about the unfolding tragedy in the prisons run by the incumbent regime. That was the tedious and time consuming part of the translation process.

This former prisoner of conscience gave this interview on the basis of anonymity lest he is thrown back into the notorious concentration camp. I have inserted what he said between inverted commas. He said **“I was abducted in August 2023 from his home at 8 PM in the evening while I was playing with my kid. I was subsequently taken to the Federal Police Office located at the Mexico square in Addis Ababa city. There I was subjected to a barrage of degrading insults and threats that were psychologically damaging to me during 8 days of my stay at this police office”**. He said that **“For 8 days I was not allowed to see my family members, talk to a lawyer and I was held incommunicado. During my interrogation by the prison officials, sometimes 5 and at other time 7 interrogators came to interrogate me”**.

### **Degradingly Humiliating Insults Directed at Amara Prisoners**

This prisoner said that **“I was addressed as a leprous<sup>2</sup> Amara, as trouble maker Amara and I was told that I would be returned to my place i.e. the Amara**

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<sup>2</sup> - It has become so fashionable among Oromo ethno-nationalists (including Oromo university graduates) to deride Amaras as lepers as though leprosy is a disease that uniquely affects the Amara people. The fact that Oromo ultra-nationalists deride Amaras as leprous says a lot about the depth of their hatred vis a vis a people whose identity they want to erase by equating the identity of a whole population group with a highly feared and stigmatized bacterially caused

**region as though Addis Ababa (where he lives and comes from) was no more a place where I have the right to belong to as an Amara. Fortunately I was not physically tortured but they have left an indelible mark on my psyche i.e. they have left me with a psychological scar etched on my mind and from which I may not be able to recover”.**

**He said that “Humiliating and degrading insults accompanied the torture sessions to which the prisoners were subjected. The interrogations were accompanied by threats, degrading insults and stigmatizing questions such as you leprous Amara what are you doing here in Oromia<sup>3</sup> as though Amaras**

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disease i.e. leprosy. Imputing or attributing a stigmatized identity on the Amara population as done by Oromo ultra-nationalist forces (includes all Oromo ethno-nationalist organizations in Ethiopia) is how these organizations have succeeded in rendering the Amara people as dreaded pathogens who should be disposed of or physically eradicated – a process which we have witnessed through the ethnic cleansing of more than one million Amaras from what is now dubbed Oromia regional state. What particularly transpired in Wellega, Western Shewa, southern Shewa, Arsi, Hararge, Bale, Jimma, etc during the last few years is a consequence of such hateful propaganda that has cast aspersion on the good name of Amaras. Calling Amaras leprous or ቆጣጣ is a genocidal code word of incitement which anyone with a sense of humanism and justice has to fight tooth and nail. The demonizing term leprous or ቆጣጣ is as potentially genocidal as the characterization of the Tutsis as cockroaches or Jews as vermin. Such degrading and stigmatizing words that animalize the ethnic other (i.e Amaras in this case) and pathologize the identity of a whole ethnic group removes the pathologized and animalized Amara from the realm of moral community. It is this process of pathologization and animalization of the ethnic other (in this case the Amaras) that disinhibits the moral restraints on the Oromo ultra-nationalists. It is such moral restraints which normally prevents one from committing moral transgressions such as subjecting Amaras to ethnic cleansing and genocidal killings such as the ones we widely witnessed in Wellega, western Shewa and now in Arsi and Bale.

<sup>3</sup> - Oromia is the largest ethnic enclosure carved out by the TPLF/OLF duo in 1991. These two groups which dominated the Transitional Government created ethnically defined enclosures in the aftermath of the defeat of the Dergue military dictatorship in May 1991. The remapping of Ethiopia a la fascist Italy’s fascistic political project practiced in the period 1935-1941, was informed by the ethnic federalism that divided Ethiopia along ethnic lines. Since 1991, ethnic federalism bestowed ownership rights of the newly carved ethnic regions on the numerically dominant ethnic group in each respective ethnically-carved region. It is this politically discriminatory political project that made millions of Amaras living in what is now dubbed Oromia regional state secondary citizens with no legal right to claim for themselves as citizens of Ethiopia. Simply, millions of Amaras living outside the Amara ethnic enclosure or Amara regional state have been disenfranchised overnight. Millions of Amaras in the Oromia regional state are not allowed to learn in their own language, cannot aspire to assume administrative roles in this region, are not allowed to exercise their religious freedom thereby being forced to abandon their Orthodox faith, change their religion, Christian names, etc in order to survive as people. So

## **have no right to reside in the Oromia regional state which is still part of Ethiopia?”**

According to this former prisoner it has been in the following manner that the Oromo prison officials threatened him and other Amara prisoners when the latter were subjected to interrogations:

**“Unless and until we have destroyed the Amaras and the Orthodox church followers, we will never have rest”** was one of the threatening utterances of the Oromo torturers. This former prisoner said that he and the other Amara prisoners were taunted and ridiculed with the following phrases **“you Debtera, descendant of Debteras<sup>4</sup>”**.

Further this prisoner said the Amara prisoners were threatened in the following manner. **“If something happens to the federal army or anything happens in Addis Ababa, we will take action against you, your children and wife<sup>5</sup>. You will**

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today, it is common to observe the Orthodox Christian name Negatu being changed into Ali or Ahmed. This is the case for example for millions of Amaras born and raised in areas like my own birth place Hararghe and areas such as Arsi, Bale, etc. Presently the only regional state where other ethnic minorities are afforded their own administration, right to learn in their own language and profess their own religious beliefs is the Amara regional state. Minority groups such as the Argoba, Oromo, Agew and Kemant living in the so-called Amara regional state have been given their own administrative regions that are administered by the respective natives of these ethnic groups.

<sup>4</sup> - Debtera – is a learned man trained in the Geez language has a mastery of Qene and Zema. Unfortunately, the Ethiopian left generation in its attempt to discredit the traditional church education which it viewed as being an impediment to progress and as an appendage of Haile Selassie’s government, began to use this word in a derogatory way. Being one of the ill-informed foot-soldiers of that generation, I deeply regret and apologize for entertaining such disdainful attitude towards learned traditional people such as Debeteras without whose existence the rich and as of yet untapped writings related to Ethiopian history, culture, liturgy, traditional medicine, astronomy, etc would not have been possible.

<sup>5</sup> - This threatening warnings of taking deadly retaliatory measures against Amara civilians for the actions of the Fano resistance forces currently fighting in the Amara regional state has been borne out by the practices of the Ethiopian federal army. At the end of January 2024, in a town called Merawi located in Gojjam (part of the Amara regional state) 89 innocent civilians were taken out of their homes and massacred brutally consequent upon the attack Fano forces carried out against the repressive federal army that is maiming and killing Amaras indiscriminately. Such retaliatory massacres by the Ethiopian Federal Army have been widely perpetrated in all parts of what is now dubbed the Amara regional state. International human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch have alerted the international community about this massacre of civilians after they conducted interviews with the surviving townsfolk.

**be the first person against whom we will take drastic measures”. The ex-prisoner added that “Most of us who have been held in Awash Arba were abducted from Addis Ababa, the city where we live in. Similar threats were made against the other Amara inmates at Awash Arba. All these prisoners were taken from their homes or were abducted from the streets of Addis Ababa as they were going to their work place or returning from their work place to their homes. What is painful about our abduction is that during our abduction, we were suddenly surrounded by a large number of security men ranging in numbers from at least 10 to 20 armed men. The hatred shown to us the prisoners, the arbitrary manner of our abduction and the size of the group that came to abduct us, were all meant to strike fear not only into us and our families but also the people living around us. The threatening manner with which we the prisoners were confronted during our abduction did not take into account the negative ramifications of such actions on the social standing of us the imprisoned individuals in our own neighborhoods. Because of this extremely threatening and unexpected attack I experienced while being abducted from home, even after having been released from prison, I still feel very anxious and tense in my daily life because of the devastatingly pervasive fear that has been instilled in my mind”.**

The former prisoner added **“The fact that I was taken from my home after my home has been violently searched by more than ten-armed people as though I am a criminal, the fact that people in my neighborhood had to witness my mistreatment has made me feel humiliated and feel bad about myself. Experiencing all this has dented my personal identity, my sense of personhood and my social standing in my own neighborhood”.** This prisoner said that he was taken from Addis Ababa to Awash Arba along with nine other Amara individuals.

### **Imprisonment of Amaras on the basis of Trumped-up Charges**

The former prisoner related:

**“We were charged with an attempt to topple the incumbent government. We were asked if we know certain individuals whom the incumbent regime suspects are leading the armed opposition (i.e. the Fano movement) against it. The grueling interrogation process took between three, four or sometimes up to six hours. The problem is that giving an answer to their questions invites more problem for us. On the other hand, not answering their questions also invites problem for us as well. All of us have spent 8 days at the Federal Police**

**Investigation Office in Addis Ababa before we were later taken to the Awash Arba military camp that doubles up as a prison. Having failed to find any evidence that would incriminate us at the Federal Police Investigation Office in Addis Ababa, they have subsequently sent us to the Awash Arba prison before we were even brought to the court of law”.**

This former abductee or prisoner related the following.

**“In addition to being denied appearance at the court of justice, we were not allowed visit by our families. We were not assigned lawyers and we have been prevented to have access to telephones. Our families were not informed about our whereabouts. Me and the other Amara prisoners did not consider ourselves as prisoners since we were not accorded the rights due to legal prisoners such as access to our families, lawyers and the right to appear at the court of law. I myself and the other Amara prisoners considered ourselves as abductees. Me and most of the other prisoners were woken up out of our sleep during our stay in prison in Addis Ababa and taken away to Awash Arba at 4 AM in the morning so that nobody could see us when we were transported or whisked away to this hellish prison located next to a military camp at Awash Arba. At one time, there were 70 Amara prisoners like me and later that figure has dropped to 60 prisoners. Ten of the prisoners who fainted and were severely weakened by various factors (hunger, disease, exhaustion, dehydration, etc) were taken to Addis Ababa. The prisoners at Awash Arba were all members of the Amara ethnic group and there were no other prisoners from the other ethnic groups of Ethiopia”.**

### **Subjecting Amaras to Physical and Psychological Suffering**

This former prisoner added:

**“Awash Arba has been turned into the concentration camp where Amaras are severely punished, made to suffer physical deprivation, psychological and physical torture. Awash Arba is the place where educated Amaras are brought to and incarcerated and warehoused in a highly suffocated room. The ranks of these Amara intellectuals currently held in the Awash Arba concentration camp run the whole gamut from university professors, medical specialists, doctors, journalists, engineers, teachers, nurses, etc. The benumbingly extreme temperature of this hellish place ranges from 42 to 47 degrees centigrade and owing to the humidity, it is unbearably and forbiddingly inhospitable place to live in. In one room, 60 Amaras have been squeezed or huddled together. This**

**room in which 60 Amaras have been huddled together has no window to let in fresh air. The place at which the Awash Arba prison is located is very hot, humid, full of wild animals, big snakes, crocodile, insects. Most of the prisoners have experienced severe weight loss secondary to the starvation they suffer there owing to the disease-infested and insalubrious living condition obtaining at this notorious and hellish prison. The heat at this place is such that the condition of life we experienced in this prison is like a bread that was being cooked in an oven (exposed to fire from below and above)”.**

**“I myself had lost 6 kg during my imprisonment at this prison. We were made to suffer at this infernal place without any due process of law, without our case having been presented at the court of law. We were not provided enough water and food in that hellish prison. The one piece of bread we were given was a left-over of rats which were in abundance in that prison. It was not unusual to find feces of rats inside the one piece of bread we were given per day. A journalist named Mr. Yehualashet came across feces of rats in his bread on four different occasions. Worms were spotted in the bread we were fed and this was deliberately done to harm our health. In terms of food, we have been deliberately starved very badly. We were made to undergo both physical and psychological suffering. The other remaining prisoners are still undergoing this suffering at Awash Arba concentration camp”.**

**“As I speak now, our brothers and sisters are under great suffering at Awash Arba concentration camp. There is no other food than a piece of bread that is given to us. The water we are provided is scanty, inadequate and infested with disease-causing microorganisms. This appallingly unhygienic condition obtaining in this prison has led to the break out of epidemics. So far, we have experienced epidemic outbreaks related to disease-infested and unclean water on more than 5 occasions within a two months period. I have myself suffered from amoeba infection. So, we prisoners are suffering a lot and words cannot convey the suffering we have gone through out there”.**

### **The Suffering of Amara Prisoners Under the Scorching Heat at Awash Prison**

**This former prisoner related:**

**“There was a time in which prisoners pleaded with the prison authorities by saying that please take us out and kill us by bullets than making us suffer under this extreme heat and suffocation. The prisoners told the prison authorities that they are ready to sign a statement in which they agree to being**

**shot by bullet than suffering under extreme heat. We prisoners were obliged to make such desperate plea to end our lives after it became impossible for us to resist the combination of hunger, thirst, extreme heat, exhaustion, suffocation and infectious diseases at the prison where we were held up in the most dehumanizing condition any human being can think of. As a result of the extremely dehumanizing condition obtaining in the prison, 18 prisoners fainted and fell on the ground unable to maintain their bearing or gait and walk normally. For example, Mr. Belete, the husband of Mrs. Keleb Seyoum, was almost dead when he was finally referred to a hospital in Addis Ababa and sent there for treatment. I do not know when this suffering of our brothers and sisters is going to end. What I would like to say is that there are a lot of our brothers and sisters who are still suffering in this prison. Although few individuals like me have been set free by the will and help of God, there are still many prisoners who are suffering at this prison. This prison is not even fit for animals to live in let alone for human beings. Particularly, individuals such as Mr. Yohannes Buayalew are suffering a lot. His legs are bursting and fluid is being drained out of his body using syringes. This man has been so emaciated that only his skeleton remains to be seen. What we have been urinating was blood<sup>6</sup> (a medical condition called hematuria). Mr. Yohannes Buayalew (elected member of the parliament of the Amara regional government), Mr. Christian Taddelle (member of the parliament of the Federal Ethiopian government), Dr. Kassa Teshager (elected member of Addis Ababa city council) and Dr. Addise Berhanu are undergoing severe suffering. All of these people were urinating blood.**

**Amara prisoners have been electrocuted, their nails have been removed and they have been beaten up after their bodies have been immersed in cold water. There are prisoners whose noses and mouths are bleeding owing to the physical beatings they have sustained and have been exposed to”.**

This former further said:

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<sup>6</sup> - Blood in a urine is medically known as hematuria. Hematuria is caused by one of at least the following conditions such as a)- trauma (secondary to torture such as damage to bladder or kidney after being hit), b) urinary tract infection c) cancer of the kidney, bladder or prostate among others. It is very likely that these prisoners suffer from hematuria secondary to trauma (beating/torture) that cause damage to these aforementioned parts of the body or due to infection secondary to the poor nutritional and health condition obtaining in this hellish place where these prisoners are held against their will.



**“When I think of the punishment meted to us, it is the same kind of treatment to which the Jewish people were subjected by Hitler. The treatment we have received in this prison is similar to what Hitler did to the Jews. Hitler exposed Jews to a sealed hall sprayed with chemicals in order to establish how long a human being can resist such a harsh regime. In our case, we are held in a sealed and highly congested cell with temperature higher than 42 degrees centigrade. The government is subjecting us to such level of heat by way of conducting an experiment on us in order to find out what level of heat human beings are able to tolerate. Amaras are being experimented on by being subjected to such a cruel regime of imprisonment. I do not know what else this regime can do to us as human beings more than making us suffer to the point at which our body begins to dissolve and disintegrate under an extreme level of heat. Many have lost weight ranging from 5, 10, 15 to 18 kilograms. The only thing which they have not done to us by way of causing suffering to us is to grind our bones and make soap with it like the Nazis did to Jewish prisoners. If they have not done this so far it is because, unlike the Nazis, they do not have the technology and the factory to process bones into soaps.**

**The prisoners who particularly need immediate medical care are Mr. Yohannes Buayalew, Mr. Christian Tadle, Dr. Kassa Tesahager and Dr. Adisse Birhanu. For example, Mr. Yohannes Buayalew is someone who already suffers from diabetes mellitus, hypertension and his body parts are cracking up and releasing fluid. This person could not stand up on his own. He was briefly brought to a hospital in Addis Ababa but immediately returned to this prison before he could receive adequate treatment. Mr. Christian Tadle has a severe back pain problem and he cannot eat food (has poor appetite). His health condition is very poor.**

**I do not know what three of the members of the Investigation Board members, a committee meant to oversee the conduct of the government under the State of Emergency, felt when they came to our prison and saw their former parliamentary<sup>7</sup> colleague in such a state of poor physical health condition. Mr. Christian Tadle cannot resist the condition of suffering obtaining in this prison any more.**

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<sup>7</sup> - According to the Ethiopian law, elected parliament members are immune to imprisonment. These parliamentary members were subjected to arbitrary arrest and dehumanization before their immunity has been revoked or withdrawn by a legal body or court order.

**Dr. Kassa Teshager does not sleep at all. He is suffering from anxiety related to the worries he harbors in regard to the mental illness of his son<sup>8</sup> who needs someone to care for. All these prisoners have been prevented from meeting their families and have been denied all the rights due to a legal prisoner such as visit by family members.**

**The other person who is suffering a lot is Dr. Addise Berhanu (brother of Mr. Menber Alemu) who is a lecturer at Jimma university. Dr. Addise Berhanu had a car accident in the past. Owing to the damage he sustained during the car accident, a metal has been inserted in his right leg. Due to the extreme temperature at Awash prison, the metal plate inserted in his leg expands during the day and contracts when the temperature drops down during the night. All this causes severe pain to him. He cannot move his right leg properly and cannot use the toilet as sitting on a toilet becomes a very difficult task for him.**

**A teacher called Mr. Berhane Meskel Agaje suffers a lot also. He has to be put on glucose infusion on six occasions after his health condition worsened. He suffers from severe gastritis<sup>9</sup> and hemorrhoids<sup>10</sup>. There was a young man who had been released and used to suffer from hemorrhoids. The prison guards used to ridicule and mock this prisoner who was suffering from anal bleeding caused by hemorrhoids by telling him to go outside and expose his butt to fresh air. The whole picture at Awash Arba concentration camp looks like this. I cannot exhaustively and adequately describe the suffering of prisoners in this place.**

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<sup>8</sup> - Readers can infer from here the ramification of the suffering that affects family members of imprisoned head of families like Dr. Teshager. The illegal imprisonment not only affects the imprisoned person but adversely impacts the mental and physical health of vulnerable family members and such as the son of Dr. Teshager who badly needs the support his imprisoned father.

<sup>9</sup> - Gastritis refers to an inflammation of the stomach. Although it has different causes, it can be triggered and worsened by stress and anxiety. The stressful situation obtaining at this prison can predispose vulnerable prisoners to gastritis.

<sup>10</sup> - Hemorrhoids a medical condition that leads to severe anal bleeding and is made worse by the insalubrious condition obtaining at the Awash Arba concentration camp.

**In all, there were 70 prisoners at this prison all of whom are Amaras. Of these, 10 were sent to Addis Abeba. Now 60 remain at Awash Arba prison. Of the 60 prisoners, 31 have left Awash Arba prison but this does not mean that all 31 prisoners have been released or set free. Of the 31 prisoners who left Awash Arba prison, a man called Mr. Yonas (who hails from Bahir Dar) is still at the Federal Police prison station even after he has been issued a certificate that states that he has been released. The wife of Brigadier general Teferra Mammo<sup>11</sup>, Mrs. Mennen Haile and a woman nurse named sister Hiwot were also in prison. They were first held in Addis Ababa and later brought to Awash Arba. They were held in a dark room for 13 days”.**

### **Visit Made by the Investigation Board Members Made to the Awash Arba Prison**

**“Seven members of the Investigating board came to our prison. Among them were Mr. Sadik, Dr. Mamaat. I cannot exactly tell you on which date they came as I cannot remember a lot. The heat at that prison is such that our capacity to remember things and our memory in general have been severely compromised. I want to let everyone know this. There are a lot of well-educated Amaras in that prison but we are losing them. The Board of Investigation which consisted of 7 committee members and paid a visit to our prison was not willing to listen to our problems and suffering. The board members were rather keen on engaging us in a negotiation with the incumbent government as if we were leaders of the armed resistance being posed to the regime by Fanos in the Amara region. The committee members stayed at our prison and talked to us for 5 hours. The following is what some of the prisoners told them”.**

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<sup>11</sup> - Brigadier Teferra Mammo is man who has been head of the Amara Specialized Forces and gallantly fought against the TPLF army which made violent forays into the Amara region and caused enormous human and material destruction. His force was instrumental in repulsing the fascistic onslaught of TPLF which rode roughshod over Ethiopia for 27 years when it again came dangerously close to Debre Sina- a town located just some 150 kms north of Addis Ababa. This general was imprisoned for 9 years by the defunct TPLF regime after having being charged with an attempt to topple the TPLF regime. He had been released from prison following the ousting of the TPLF in 2018. He has sustained serious wounds while fighting during the recent war against the TPLF. He was denied exit visa by the incumbent Oromo regime and prevented from travelling to Israel for treatment. His wife Mrs. Mennen Haile, who was supporting him and taking care of him, was whisked away without any court warrant from her home and thrown into Awash Arba prison. As stated earlier, she has been held in confined to a dark room for 13 days.

## **The Bold and Defiant Reply of Mr. Abay Zewdu<sup>12</sup> to the Members of the Investigation Board**

**“We would not complain to you about the hunger, thirst, extreme heat we are suffering from as you have put us in this hellish place with the intent of doing deliberate harm to us. But let me tell you one thing. You have made my only country Ethiopia, a country that buys drones to bomb its own innocent people (referring to the current bombardment of civilians by drones). As for me, you can throw me in the fire-spewing volcanic lake of Ertale<sup>13</sup>. There is nothing you have not done to us and to the Amara people. If it was not for lack of sophisticated technological capacity and input you contend with, you could have made soap out of our bones. We are being guarded by crocodiles and big snakes in this hellishly hot area. Our people are suffering from lack of protection, lack of health care, lack of food. Our people are being bombed by drones and there is no one to treat their festering wounds. Therefore, there is no reason why we should tell you about our suffering as you relish and enjoy hearing about our pain. I am ready to face all the suffering that is meted out to me for being an Amara, even if that means being hanged in public”.**

**“Many of the Amara prisoners have defiantly and fearlessly spoken out about the injustice that has been perpetrated on us and the Amara people at large. The members of the Board of Investigation have been made to hear not what they expected to hear. They were told by the Amara prisoners the bitter truth they did not want to hear about. The members of this Board of Investigation have been told about the cruelty and evil character of the regime which has turned Ethiopia into a country whose history would be remembered as one shot through and through by barbarism and a killer system. The members of this Investigation Board, who claimed that they have no power to do anything about the plight of us the prisoners, were told that they are actually collaborators and accomplices of the incumbent regime that kills and maims innocent citizens. The**

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<sup>12</sup> - Mr. Abay Zewdu, is a very courageous journalist who has been repeatedly imprisoned in the past. More than any one, this journalist has been instrumental in bringing to light the plight of the genocidal campaign to which Amaras living in Wellega (part of the Oromia regional state), are routinely exposed. In spite of repeated threats made against his life, he continued to carry out this humanist task consistently and unflinchingly till his abduction and imprisonment by the current regime.

<sup>13</sup> - Ertale is an active volcanic place located in one of the hottest places on earth located in the Afar desert.

members of this Investigation Board were challenged by the prisoners with the following question. If you feel powerless to do anything as members of the Board of Investigation that is supposed to have oversight over what is happening under the State of Emergency Law at this time, what are you doing then as committee members of this board? The members of the board of investigation were very upset by the content and the defiant tone of the response they got from us the prisoners. What they heard from us the prisoners was not what they expected to hear.. The Board of Investigation (የአስቸኳይ ጊዜ አዋጅ መርማሪ ቦርድ) which is supposed to have oversight upon the State of Emergency imposed by the incumbent government was informed about the alarming conditions obtaining in our prison. But they did nothing to improve our plight”.

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## **Political Training and Indoctrination Given to Amara Prisoners Before their Release**

“Before we were released, we were taken from Awash Arba to Awash Sebat the latter being a training center of the federal police. Fifteen (15) prisoners were taken from Awash Arba and ten (10) prisoners were brought from a prison in Addis Ababa. Of the ten (10) prisoners who were brought from Addis Ababa, figure individuals like Mrs. Mennen Haile and Mrs. Hiwot (a nurse). These twenty five (25) prisoners were taken to Awash Sebat for what the prison officials dubbed a training<sup>14</sup>. After they were taken to this place, they were told that they are now released because they have not committed any crime. Look at

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<sup>14</sup> - This is a political indoctrination program meant to inculcate the views of the incumbent regime into the minds of prisoners who are about to be released upon completion of this forced indoctrination program.

what happened. After they subjected us to severe punishment by putting us in a place where wild animals roam, they took us to Awash Sebat Federal Police training center where we were to be subjected to a so-called training program of five (5) days. The training was given by political cadres of the ruling Prosperity Party wing that hail from the Amara region. One of these trainers is named Mr. Werkalemahu whose father's name I am not willing to divulge. He is the mayor of Debre Birhan town in northern Shewa. The other trainer was a man named Fentahun, who said he is mayor of Gondar, a city in northern Ethiopia. I think both are probably members of the newly created Amara Democratic party, part of the ruling Prosperity party.

The training manual was 45 or 47 pages-long document and it was entitled ሰላም ለሁሉን፤ ጫናችን ለሰላማችን (in Amharic language) which translates into Peace to All of Us & Our Role in Peace. We were made to read this document. The document details the advantages and disadvantages of peace. It contains threatening and criminalizing statements. This document criminalizes us the prisoners and tell us that we are not free from crime. It accuses us the prisoners of being killers. It alleges that we have killed Prosperity Party members. At the same time, it makes a plea to us not to kill the Prosperity Party members. It is ironic that these very government officials who imprison and kill us accuse us of killing their members. We as prisoners were threatened with the possibility of being imprisoned once again even after release from prison. Although these government functionaries talk about peace, actually they are not preaching peace. Actually, we the prisoners are individuals who know more about the advantage of peace than them. Medical doctors whom this government has imprisoned know the benefit of peace – something which they need in order to treat sick people and restore their health. Preaching peace to a medical doctor or a religious father in this prison who starts his sermon with prayer about peace as these government officials have been trying to impress upon us, sounds paradoxical or ironical. What is paradoxical than preaching about peace to Mrs. Mennen Haile after her husband Brigadier General Teferra Mamo has been denied permission to travel abroad and get medical treatment he badly needs? What sounds ironical than preaching peace to Mrs. Menen about peace while she is arbitrarily thrown into prison while her wounded husband who needs her support badly is left home on his own? The fact is though these government officials who were giving us training were brazenly bare-faced individuals and accordingly not ashamed of what they have been doing to us. These government

**officials were repeatedly using words such as extremist, killer, unitary, etc to depict the Amara Fano fighters. These statements are meant to cast aspersion on the Amara Fanos as being a group of people bent on promoting an extremist political agenda. They accuse Amaras for allegedly trying to impose a unitary state model on non-Amaras and working to bring about Amara supremacy. These government functionaries were not able to give an answer when challenged or pressed by us to define who really the killer or terrorist is – the government or the Fano”?**

**“We the prisoners who were following the so-called training, asked them as to when the targeting of Amaras is going to end. We suggested to the prison authorities the following conditions that need to be created to bring about peace:**

- the return of displaced Amaras to their former homes,**
- stopping the killing and eviction of Amaras,**
- stopping the discrimination to which Amaras are subjected economically, politically, socially, educationally and in terms of employment opportunities, etc.**

**Our trainers who gave us the political indoctrination lesson told us that the present Amara generation has been victim of false narratives which have been taught to children at schools during the last decades. Those non-Amaras who have been fed on these false narratives starting from the first grade in elementary school are the ones who are killing Amaras”.**

The trainers who came from the Amara regional government office said:

**“Yes, those false narratives are making Amaras pay dearly with their lives. However the fact Amaras are paying with their lives owing to these false narratives is justified. According to our trainers, who represent the Amara regional government, the massacre of Amara children, the dumping of the bodies of massacred Amaras in mass graves with bulldozers without any culturally prescribed burial ceremony is justified. In short according to these representatives of the Amara regional government who doubled up as political indoctrinators, the fact that Amaras are paying heavy price with their lives is**

**justified. These Amara government officials<sup>15</sup> who were training us were telling us such contradictory statements. As we were in their hands and wanted to leave this prison, we could not engage in a genuine discussion. However, even under these threatening circumstances we found ourselves in, we were able to raise valid questions which did provoke their ire and to which they had no answer.**

**These political trainers who were indoctrinating us have been using such terms as extremist, killers, unitarist to depict those members of the opposition Fano armed movement who are struggling against the incumbent regime. Our political indoctrinators, who came from the Amara regional government, know that the Amara people have totally abandoned them. What is clear from the words of our trainers is that they seem to have difficulty cracking down the present organizational structure of the popular Fano movement that has been widely embraced by the Amara people.**

**Out of the twenty five (25) Amara prisoners who were told they would be released, Mr. Belay Haile, Mrs. Menen Haile<sup>16</sup>, one federal police member who used to work at the police station located close to the Mexico square in Addis Ababa and a fourth prisoner were not released. They are still held as prisoners”.**

### **How is the Moral Stature of the Amara Prisoners Like?**

**“With regard to the morale of the Amara prisoners, psychologically all of them are very strong and highly confident of the just cause they stand for or uphold. The Amara prisoners, far from thinking about their plight in prison, have in fact been worrying about those Amaras who are daily subjected to the ravages of a full-scale war being waged against them currently.**

**These prisoners have been saying that there is nothing worse than the present situation Amaras in Ethiopia find themselves in. In fact, the prisoners are happy that through their sacrifice they are writing a new chapter as makers of history. These prisoners, far from dwelling on their current suffering, and plight, rather**

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<sup>15</sup> - During the last 33 years, the Amara people have perceived the officials of the Amara regional government as marionettes or puppets of both the previous Tigrean regime led by the TPLF and the incumbent Orommuma regime led by Abiy Ahmed Ali. For the last 33 years, these Amara officials have worked in cahoots with both the previous TPLF/EPRDF and current Orommuma Prosperity Party against the interest of the Amara people.

<sup>16</sup> - This interview was conducted some months (at the end of November 2023) ago. Mrs. Menen has now left prison.



**think about the likes of the little Amara girl (massacred in Wellega by Oromo ultra-nationalists) who begged her killers to spare her life by saying please do not kill me. These Amara prisoners do not worry about their own lives. It is the plight of the Amara people who are bombed by drones and subjected to genocide currently that worries the Amara prisoners at Awash Arba. These prisoners realize the fact that Amaras cannot experience something worse than being unceremoniously buried in mass graves as happened in the last five years. These prisoners radiate such a high morale and confidence that the prison authorities and guards are very fearful of them. We the prisoners have been able to glean or discern the fear which our prison guards experience from their body languages. Owing to their fear of us the guards at our prison have been constantly walking with their fingers on the trigger of the guns they carry with them”.**

**The Oromuma<sup>17</sup> regime has primarily targeted the Amara ethnic group. The Amaras represent a big ethnic group the identity of whose members is**

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<sup>17</sup> - It is important to define what Oromuma represents as a political concept. I offer my understanding of Orommuma as an expression of an ultra-nationalist political project informed by a fascist ideology. This fascist ideology unabashedly promotes the supremacy of Oromos in Ethiopia in the same manner Hitler promoted the supremacy of the German Aryan race. It pursues a totalitarian political project which intrudes into every aspect of the daily lives of Ethiopians. The intrusively totalitarian character of this regime spares nothing and spreads its toxic tentacles into all institutions of the Ethiopian society. So recently even the culturally informed traditional institutions such as Idirs have become victims of the totalitarian state. Idirs are self-help organizations that serve communities in discharging important social needs such as burials and give psychosocial support to members in times of illness, accidents, preparations of marriages, etc. Now every Idir is required to be officially registered with the government. This is an unprecedented act that violates the last truly indigenous voluntary organization that has maintained an independent existence for centuries. Orommuma is bent on the dangerous political project of creating an ethnically homogenous Oromia state by ethnically cleansing non-Oromos. This radically bloody political project not only presupposes the creation of a new geographical entity and country called Oromia but also is intent on creating a new Oromo society whose members (i.e Oromos) are imbued with values that promote Oromo supremacy, entitlement and justify the apartheid system obtaining now. Oromumma as a fascist ideology promotes visceral hatred to other non-Oromo ethnic groups of Ethiopia. Orommuma rejects all pan-Ethiopian values that Ethiopians share across ethnic and religious divide. The radical political project of Oromumma has morphed into the drive to bring about the rebirth of a new Oromo society whose members assume a hyperbolized sense of identity. Orommuma like all fascist movements is violent, expansionist and anti-peace. It promotes the supremacist idea of Oromos as being the master race of Ethiopia in the same manner ordinary Germans believed that they were members of the superior Aryan race during the Nazi rule. The disastrous consequence of this social

**intimately entwined with the identity of Ethiopia. Owing to the size of the Amara population and their history of jealously guarding the independence of Ethiopia at a great cost, the incumbent regime fears that once organized the Amaras would pose the greatest threat to its political project of creating a new Oromia<sup>18</sup> country on the ruins of Ethiopia. Although Amaras have been targeted today as the main enemies of the regime, the highly repressive and expansionist policies of the incumbent regime have not spared other ethnic groups such as the Gurages, Gamos, Konsos, Gedeos, Sidamas, Afars, Somalis, Gambella, Benishangul etc. These other groups realize that after the defeating and destroying the Amaras, the incumbent regime would turn against them with the**

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engineering project and the attendant consequence thereof is already visible as witness the ethnic cleansing of 700000 non-Oromos from the so-called Sheger city. Sheger is a city carved out of what was hitherto Addis Ababa, the multi-ethnic, multi-religious capital city of Ethiopia, by annexing parts of Addis Ababa city illegally. The decision to create Sheger city came consequent upon the agreement of two senior Oromo officials (i.e. Adanetch Abebe, mayor of Addisa Ababa and Mr. Shimelis Abdissa, president of the Oromia regional government}. The massive demolition currently underway in Addis Ababa fits with the grand idea obliterating any historical memory and traces of Ethiopian history that contradict the Oromumma project of creating a new Oromo country on the ruins of Ethiopia. Like all radical regimes inspired by fascist ideas and praxis, Oromumma is territorial, militarily expansionist, war-like, violent and is not amenable to rational thinking and logic. Oromumma as an ultra-nationalist political project is informed by irrationality, sentiment and the recrudescence of barbaric practices such as the slaughtering of human beings, burning alive Amaras by members of both the Oromo specialized forces of the Oromia regional government and its rival faction called the Oromo Liberation Army (dubbed Shene by the Abiy regime). Orommuma as a fascist ideology informed by ultra-nationalism puts higher premium on blood ties and ethnic identity. It rejects political organization based on humanist political values such as equality, fraternity, democracy and the rule of law, mutual accommodation of differences, etc. Oromumma being informed by a fascist ideology, has created millions of Oromo followers (example the Queros or radicalized Oromo youth) who fanatically worship hyperbolized Oromo cultural identity as their new religion by supplanting the religions such as Christianity and Islam to which Oromos hitherto adhered. Oromumma being a fascist ideology informed by social Darwinism where the strongest always rides roughshod over the weak, does not believe in compromise and a win-win political accommodation. Many political analysts and pundits tend to attribute the present political crisis in Ethiopia to the personality of Abiy by attributing his dismal records to his psychopathic and narcissistic personality. Such superficial understanding of the present crisis in Ethiopia overlooks the weight of the radical ultra-nationalist political project that took shape in Ethiopia with the birth of the TPLF 49 years ago and the establishment of a fascist state in Ethiopia since May 1991. The Tigran led fascist state that took power in Ethiopia in May 1991 has been replaced by an Oromo-led fascist regime in 2018. Both fascist groups are informed by radical ultra-nationalist ideology bent on the deconstruction of Ethiopia as a multi-ethnic nation.

<sup>18</sup> - Oromia is a new country which hitherto is not known in history as a separate country or state

**goal of destroying their identity, occupying their lands and creating a homogenous Oromia state.**

**The Oromumma regime is slowly creating a new Oromia country that has no any previous history of independence existence. Today, if you go to Mercato (the biggest market in Africa), Oromos have been elbowing out from the business sector other ethnic groups such as the Tigreans, Gurages, Amaras, etc. Today the Oromos dominate this market to the detriment of non-Oromo ethnic groups. All these bode ill for the peace and coexistence of the Ethiopian people in this country. No ethnic group would be spared from this onslaught of the Oromumma regime. To prevent the disintegration of Ethiopia and mutual destruction, I urge the people of Ethiopia to join hands and remove the incumbent political order”.**

**Names of Some of the Amara prisoners held in the Awash military camp feature the following individuals**

**Mr. Yohannes Buayalew – elected member of the Amara regional parliament who suffers from diabetes mellitus and complications thereof.**

**Dr. Girma (lecturer at Jimma University)**

**Dr. Kassa Teshager, elected member of the Addis Ababa city council**

**Mrs. Mennen Haile (wife of Brigadier general Teferra Mammo former head of the Amara Special Forces). Her husband who has been wounded repeatedly in various wars has been denied permission to leave Ethiopia for medical treatment abroad. This happened long after medical doctors inside Ethiopia who have examined him have advised him to seek specialized treatment outside Ethiopia as the treatment which he needs is not available in Ethiopia.**

**Sister Yeshe (a nurse)**

**Mr. Sintayehu Chekol Dejene<sup>19</sup> (a diabetic patient)**

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<sup>19</sup> - Mr. Sintayehu Chekol Dejene is a man who has been jailed on multiple occasions by the now defunct TPLF and incumbent regimes. He suffers from diabetes mellitus – a disease that is exacerbated by stressful conditions obtaining in this prison.

**Mr. Abay Zewdu (is a journalist who was repeatedly imprisoned before). He told them upfront that they can pound or batter his bones and is not afraid of death.**

**Mr. Christian Tadelle, elected member of the Ethiopian Federal Parliament**

**Mr. Bekalu Alamrew Shitu, a journalist**

**Mr. Melak Ayanaw Tigabe**

**Mr. Temesgen Dilnesa Alegn**

**Mr. Likku Enawgaw Yihune**

**Mr. Temesgen Abebe Mesfin**

**Dr. Adisse Berhanu (lecturer at Jimma university)**

**Dr. Simegnew Alemineh, a medical doctor who used to work at the Black Lion Teaching hospital and chairman of the Amara Medical Association in Ethiopia.**

After this interview was conducted, many other Amaras have been abducted and thrown into the Awash Arba concentration camp. One such individual currently languishing at Awash Arba is Mr. Belay Manaye. He is a prominent journalist, who a few years ago, was also imprisoned following the killing of Mr. Hatchalu Hundessa, an Oromo ultra-nationalist and singer. As I write this paper, reports coming out of Ethiopia say more than one thousand Amara youth have been abducted from Addis Ababa and thrown into the Awash Arba concentration camp.

**Translators's note:**

During the last 33 years, Ethiopia has been ruled by two ultra-nationalist regimes whose policies are informed by a fascist ideology that openly preach the supremacy of a chosen ethnic group (Tigreans between 1991-2018 and now Oromos since 2018). Both regimes have created an apartheid system in Ethiopia. The incumbent regime whose policies are informed by fascist ideology is trying to destroy the pan-Ethiopian institutions that held together Ethiopians across the religious and ethnic divide. Pan-Ethiopian institutions have become targets of destruction for both the

TPLF and the incumbent Oromo regime. For the current Oromo regime, pan-Ethiopian institutions are seen as impediment to its drive of creating a new Oromo state ethnically cleansed of non-Oromos. It is based on this apartheid policy that part of Addis Abeba city has been annexed to the so-called Oromia regional state and the city of Sheger has been ethnically cleansed of non-Oromos by driving out 700000 non-Oromos. This has been accomplished by demolishing the houses of non-Oromos and reducing these non-Oromos into destitute people overnight. The Oromization of the capital city Addis Abeba is in line with the claim made by five different Oromo political groups in Ethiopia who came out boldly on Ethiopian television and claimed Addis Ababa as an Oromo city. This regime like all fascist regimes before it is war-like, thrives on crisis, pursues expansionist policies that violate the rights of non-Oromos that it perceives as a threat to its political project of creating a homogenous Oromia state ethnically cleansed of non-Oromos. The incumbent Oromumma regime has created a visible sense of supremacy and entitlement among millions of its radicalized youth Oromo followers known as the Querros. Jawar Mohammed, a fascist thug has been able to mobilize millions of radicalized Oromo youth crowds, went with his fanatic followers to an area called Koye Fetche and demanded the distribution of thousands of apartments to Oromos who did not pay a penny for these apartments. Thousands of Ethiopians of non-Oromo descent who paid money for years hoping to get these apartments were denied the very apartments for which they paid so much money. It was Mr. Takelle Umma, an Oromo ultra-nationalist who was unlawfully made mayor of Addis Ababa that unabashedly gave away to Oromos freely thousands of apartments for which many non-Oromos have paid huge amounts of money. This is the sense of

entitlement Oromos in present Ethiopia feel in the same way Tigreans felt in a strong sense of entitlement in the period from 1991-2018.

The bold assertion of five Oromo political organizations that the capital city Addis Ababa belongs to Oromos six years ago another instance of a hyperbolized sense of entitlement and brazen assertion of Oromo supremacy in Ethiopia. The brazenly expansionist drive of armed Oromo forces into non-Oromo territories by way of annexing these regions through ethnic cleansing of non-Oromos clearly corroborates this fascist drive and search for Lebensraum (life-space) a la Nazi Germany. What the Tigreans did by illegally occupying Welkait, Telemet and Raya was in line with creating a comfortable life space (Lebensraum) for the superior ethnic group of Ethiopia. Repeatedly, the Oromo Liberation Front, which is visibly supported by the incumbent Oromumma regime, has launched a deadly attack on the town of Ataye, and destroyed many houses, ransacked and pillaged the town and forced tens of thousands of people in areas of north Shewa like Dera, Shewa Robbit, Kara Kore, Majete, etc and eastern Shewa (such as Minjar, Awra Godana town), etc. Awra Godana town was ransacked and more than 3200 of its Amara inhabitants forcibly displaced after the incumbent regime and the Oromo specialized forces its dispatched carried out heinous deeds against the defenseless Amaras who used to live in this town. Today, this town which lies on the strategic route connecting Addis Ababa with Djibouti has been duly incorporated as part of the Oromia state.

This fascistic regime is bent on a social engineering political project through which it has been able to annex part of what was Addis Ababa to the Oromia regional state thereby creating an Oromo city called Sheger after having demolished more than one hundred and ten thousand houses owned by non-Oromos. By so doing, it has ethnically cleansed the Amara people and to some extent the Gurages, Gammos and other people of southern Ethiopia. It has embarked on a systematic ethnic cleansing of Addis Ababa city by imposing exorbitant urban land tax meant to break the economic backbone of non-Oromos who would be forced to leave the city unable to pay such exorbitant taxes. All this is done by way of ethnically cleansing non-Oromos from the city. Mr. Shimeles Abdissa has openly said that his government has embarked on the task of “returning Oromos to their original place” implying that the non-Oromos who are being ethnically cleansed from Addis Ababa are aliens or intruders who have no right to live in Addis Ababa.

During the last 6 years, government institutions are preponderantly staffed by Oromos who feel entitled to lord it over Ethiopians. As I write this paper, several historical neighborhoods of Addis Ababa city are being demolished in a manner that has no precedence in any part of the world. The systematically directed genocide<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> - For an account of the systematic genocide directed against Amaras (both Orthodox Christians and Amara Muslims), Orthodox Christians from other ethnic groups of Ethiopia, I refer readers to consult the following important publications that contain graphic descriptions of the genocide that has been going on during the last 35 years.

A – “መዝገበ ሰማዕታት ቅጽ አንድ” - ኢይሌይስ አርምሞ (በሞዐ ተዋህዶ የተዘጋጀ) - በ2014 ዓ. ም. የታተመ (መጽሐፍ በግዕዝና በአማርኛ የተዘጋጀ ሲሆን 376 ገጾች አሉት)። በተለያዩ ኦሮሚያ በሚባለው ክልል በአማራዎች እንደዚሁም ከአማራ ነገድ ውጭ ባሉ የኢትዮጵያ ነገዶች ተወላጆች የተፈጸመውን ፍጅት፣የህዝብ መፈናቀል፣ የሰብዓዊና ቁሳዊ ውድመት በመረጃ የሚያቀርብ ነው።

B – “**Genocide Preparation in Ethiopia When Compared to the Nazi Party and Hutu Power**” prepared by MOA Tewahdo and published in 2023. The book is 199 pages long.

that has particularly targeted the Amara people dotted in every nook and corner of Ethiopia by the now defunct Tigrean minority regime has been even amplified more during the last 6 years by its successor the Orommuma regime. Amaras in the last 6 years have been targeted for genocidal killings not only by the incumbent Orommuma regime but also by its ideological brother the Oromo Liberation Front's armed wing. True to a fascist state, genocidal campaigns have targeted Amaras owing to their ethnic identity. The Fano movement emerged to end the unprecedented existential threat posed to the Amara people once and for all and create a political order where human rights, rule of law and respect for the lives of all Ethiopian citizens is respected and guaranteed across all nooks and crannies of Ethiopia irrespective of one's ethnic/religious identities or cultural shibboleth.

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**C – “Thirty Five Years of State Led Genocide in the Presence of African Union and the International Community in Ethiopia”** prepared by MOA Tewahdo and published in 2023. 359 pages. It contains graphic images of the human and material destruction wrought in different parts of Ethiopia. **In what follows my translation of two prisoners mentioned in the above report is presented based on their recent testimony at the Addis Ababa Higher Court**

**D – ወረራና መዋቅራዊ ዘር ማጥፋት በወልቃይት-ጠገዴና ጠለምት - ጎንደር ዩኒቨርሲቲ ነሐሴ 2014 ዓ. ም.** (This is a 380 pages research document prepared by the Gondar University). It was published in 2022.

**E – The Amhara Holocaust – Accounts of the Hidden Genocide of the Amhara People in Ethiopia 1991-2015 by Muluken Tesfaw (translation from Amharic into English by T. Dessaegn), published in 2018 (329 pages)**