

War updates from Amhara Region, Ethiopia - May 12th to 19th, 2024

Updated May 21st, 2024

Overview

For the period between May 12th and 19th, 2024, fighting between Amhara Fano freedom fighters (Fano) and Prosperity Party regime joint forces (regime forces) has continued in various parts of Amhara Region while identity-based persecution targeting Amhara residents has continued in Oromia Region.¹

• There has been ongoing fighting in nearly all zones of Amhara Region while the situation in Gonder sub-region has been particularly volatile. Joint regime forces have continued deliberate attacks on unarmed civilians and civilian targets including with the use of deadly drone strikes.² Extrajudicial killings continue with victims often accused of supporting Fano (or having family members who support Fano) and attacks often targeting residential neighborhoods with targeted destruction of

¹Prosperity Party regime joint forces include but are not limited to the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), Federal Police, state militias, and riot dispersal forces.

²See the February 14th, 2024 AAA report on human rights violations in the 6-month period since the declaration of the state of emergency (read the report here).

residential houses. In particular, following military losses in battles with Fano forces, retreating regime forces have targeted civilians in reprisal attacks.

- There has also been an increase in terrorist attacks by *Tigray People's Liberation*Front (TPLF) operatives in the Welkait Tegede Setit Humera Zone and Telemt area.

 Activities include assassination attempts of local officials (carried out by a kill squad called *Kibrit*) and bombings, which are believed to be motivated by plans to invade these areas, reintroduce Tigrayan settlers and to replace existing administration and security structures with Tigrayan counterparts. There are also efforts underway to train and mobile Tigrayan recruits in UN refugees camps in Sudan. This follows recent hostilities including ethnic cleansing of more than 50,000 Amhara residents by TPLF forces in the Raya area since April 12th, 2024. 345678 In addition, on May 1st, 2024, TPLF vice-head Tadesse Werede announced they reached an agreement with the Federal Government to dismantle the Amhara administration in Telemt by the end of June 2024. TPLF forces including the *Samri* squad encamped in UN refugee camps in Sudan have been leading training exercises with an estimated 36,000 armed militants. 10
- On May 12th, an ambulance intended for the transportation of the sick and women in labour for delivery was repurposed to transport regime forces engaged in combat

³AAA update from April 16th, 2024 on extrajudicial killings targeting Amhara civilians and members of the Raya Amhara Identity and Border Repatriation Committee in Raya Alamata Woreda of North Wollo Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia (link here).

⁴Reuters Africa article from May 3rd, 2024 (link here)

⁵Article from Al-Ain Amharic from April 28th, 2024 on the situation of Amhara residents in Raya since TPLF reoccupation of the area (link here).

⁶Statement from AAA from April 23rd, 2024 on the humanitarian crisis in North Wollo and Wag Hemra Zones of Amhara Region as a result of ethnic cleansing by TPLF's invasion (link here).

⁷Statement from AAA from April 21st, 2024 on weak response from international diplomats regarding TPLF's invasion of the Raya area (link here).

⁸Statement from AAA from April 15th, 2024 calling for denouncement of TPLF's aggression in Raya (link here).

⁹Statement from Tigrai Television from May 1st, 2024 (link here))

¹⁰AAA report on the November 2020 Mai-Kadra massacre of more than 1,515 Amhara civilians in Mai-Kadra town by the TPLF's Samri squad (link here).

with Fano forces. The vehicle was subsequently attacked by Fano forces, resulting in the loss of lives and the destruction of the ambulance. Currently, throughout the Amhara Region, all vehicles designated for medical purposes have been repurposed for transportation by regime military forces.

North Shewa Zone

Kewet Woreda

On May 12th, at around 8 am, regime forces carried out two successive drone
attacks on Gulo School located in Yelen Kebele of Kewet Woreda. Sources have
reported different numbers of casualties including the number of civilians killed and
wounded in the attack. The drone attacks on Gulo School have also been
corroborated by international media outlets.¹¹¹²

Bahir-Dar Special Zone

 On May 19th, suspected Fano forces carried out a bomb attack targeting regime forces within Bahir Dar city.

North Gojjam Zone

North Mecha Woreda

 On May 19th, Fano forces carried out a sudden attack on regime forces in the area between Bahir-Dar and Merawi. The attack targeted regime soldiers stationed near the China Camp on the outskirts of Merawi town. Although the gunfire exchange was brief, regime forces suffered heavy losses.

¹¹BBC Amharic article from May 14th, 2024 (link here).

¹²Al-Ain Amharic article from May 13th, 2024 (link here).

• Between May 15th-17th, suspected Fano forces carried out surprise offensives targeting regime soldiers and officials in Merawi town. On May 15th, Fano forces launched unexpected gunfire on vehicles carrying regime soldiers, inflicting significant casualties on the regime. Subsequently, a reinforcement unit arrived and conducted indiscriminate attacks on unarmed civilians, resulting in the reported deaths of 2 civilians and injury to another (third) civilian. On May 17th, suspected Fano forces executed an attack targeting officials and their security personnel, resulting in an unspecified number of casualties among the tax officers. In response, regime soldiers killed at least 3 individuals, including an elderly person and a woman, in reprisal.

East Gojjam Zone

Awabel Woreda

• On May 9th, regime forces executed an Amhara priest and severely assaulted several other civilians in Abeqestit Kebele of Awabel Woreda. The incident occurred in the afternoon amidst a wedding ceremony where the victims predominantly deacons and priests were in attendance. When regime soldiers approached the gathering they immediately began their assault on the unarmed civilians. The regime soldiers deliberately shot and killed one of the villagers identified as Kesis Asnakew Abinew who was estimated to be in his 40s. Additionally several other civilians sustained injuries ranging from minor to moderate in severity. According to sources, Kesis Asnakew was a resident of Lekuma Kebele, a neighboring village from where the incident happened. They added he had traveled to Abeqestit solely to attend the wedding and no political ties. The following day, his body was laid to rest at the cemetery of St. Michael's Church in Lekuma Kebele.

West Gojjam Zone

Dega Damot, Quarit, Bahir-Dar Zuria, and Sekela Woredas

- Between May 18th and 19th, regime forces stationed in Jiga and Finote Selam towns repeatedly launched heavy artillery fire towards Dega Damot and Quarit Woredas despite the absence of military activity in these areas.
- On May 17th, Fano forces carried out a surprise attack on a vehicle carrying regime soldiers in the Zenzelima area of Bahir-Dar Zuria Woreda, inflicting significant casualties on regime forces.
- On May 15th, regime forces moved into the rural area of Bahirzafit in Sekela
 Woreda but the outcome remains uncertain.

North Gonder Zone

Tach Armachiho Woreda

- On May 17th regime reinforcements from Dansha and Sanja arrived in Soroqa town, and heavy gunfire has erupted since the morning.
- On May 16th, intense fighting took place between Fano forces and regime forces in Ashere Kebele.
- On My 15th, Fano forces of the Tekeze Division attacked a police station on in Soroqa town seizing numerous weapons. The successful operation resulted in the release of residents that were previously arbitrarily arrested under accusation of supporting Fano. The operation was led by a female university lecturer who recently became the vice-commander of the Tekeze Division. This development has been heralded as an inspiration and a testament to the role of women in the public resistance against the regime.

Wogera Woreda

- On May 17th, intense fighting took place lasting the entire day between joint regime
 forces and Fano in Amba-Giyorgis town (administrative center of Wogera Woreda).
 In this battle, Fano successfully repelled regime forces, seizing armaments.
 Afterwards, the Fano withdrew from the town.
- On May 16th, a fierce battle erupted between Fano and joint regime forces in Amba-Giyorgis town. The fighting began at 7 pm and lasted until 10:30 pm, and resulted in numerous casualties and injuries among regime forces. The conflict erupted when regime forces launched an offensive against a Fano stronghold. Fano forces took a defense position, repelling the advance by regime forces.
 Consequently, the Fano took control of several kebeles and villages including Webra-Tadiwos, Jejebha-Hamusit, Busqa-Mikael, Quraj-Gebriel, and Goronko-Maryam. With these strategic areas secured, Fano forces advanced on Amba-Giyorgis town. Regime forces retreated to their camp, leaving Fano to occupy the town in a decisive victory. The Fano subsequently attacked and burned down the police station in Amba-Giyorgis. Armored military vehicles dispatched from Gonder failed to rescue the encircled regime soldiers, who were eventually forced to abandon their camp.

Telemt Woreda

• On May 15th, Mayor of Mai-Temri city Ato Solomon Atalay narrowly escaped a bomb blast at his residence by the TPLF-affiliated kill squad called Kibrit. ¹³ The TPLF operatives targeted him due to his ardent support for the restoration of the Telemt area to Amhara administration. It is believed that the TPLF's Kibrit kill squad attempted to assassinate him to facilitate their invasion of these areas for re-annexation to Tigray Region.

¹³AAA X post from November 23, 2022 (link here).

• On May 13th since in the morning, the TPLF has launched an offensive against newly annexed Amhara territory of Telemt by crossing the natural border of Tekeze river. With calculated precision, they have infiltrated strategic locations in East Telemt, threatening to redraw regional boundaries. They have already fully invaded Hamsho Midir-Meda, Debre-Degebray and Mai-Gimere. The TPLF forces are advancing towards the three woredas of Telemt including East Telemt, West Telemt, and Mai-Temri with the strategic objective of capturing and annexing them into the Tigray Region. Last June 2023, residents of the Telemt area carried out peaceful demonstrations calling for official recognition of their Amhara identity and border demarcations.¹⁴

Central Gonder Zone

On May 18th, fierce fighting erupted between regime forces and Fano in Kimfaz-Begela, Metemma, Achere, and Gajet, located in Armachiho and Wegera Woredas of Central Gonder Zone. Government forces suffered significant casualties, including the capture of high-ranking military officers such as colonels.

Gonder city

- On May 17th, a meeting was convened in Gonder city by representatives of the
 National Dialogue Committee, handpicked by the Prosperity Party. However,
 participants raised probing questions that the representatives struggled to answer.
 The meeting was adjourned without any substantial progress due to a lack of
 understanding between the parties.
- On May 15th, regime forces killed a man named Mengistnew in the Piassa
 neighborhood of Gonder city. Mengistnew was a member of the Qimant Committee
 and a vocal supporter of the Qimant movement originally from Chanq village.

¹⁴AAA X post from June 18, 2023 (link here).

Mengistnew was known for his involvement in various illicit activities including kidnappings and extortion. His assassination is believed to be politically motivated, aiming to incite conflict in order to divert attention from ongoing fighting between Fano and regime forces. Amidst gunfire, he was laid to rest on May 16th at Kidane-Mihret Church in Maraki sub-city of Gonder city.

- All the police members except one member of the police working in 6th police station who were on duty have left the station secretly. They intentionally missed from their duty with their equipments. This 6th police station is located at Maraki sub-city Kebele 18 nearby the University of Gonder.
- On May 15th state militias and riot dispersal forces deployed along with regular ENDF in Ayimba, Maksegnit and Belessa have defected to Fano in significant numbers.

West Dembiya Woreda

- On May 17th, a respected Islamic religious leader was found dead in Ayimba town. While the perpetrator of the suspected murder is unknown, this incident follows a recent trend of targeted killings of Islamic religious leaders by regime forces. It is believed the regime is ordering these assassinations to incite religious conflict and divert attention from the ongoing crisis in the Amhara Region. Similar incidents have occurred in Enfranz town (North Gonder Zone), where numerous Muslims have been killed by unknown assailants.
- On May 9th and 10th intense fighting broke out in Sequential Kebele (near Ayimba).
 Regime forces advanced into the area under the belief that Fano forces were entrenched in Sequential However, the Fano forces launched a counteroffensive,

¹⁵In early April 2024, five members from the same family were killed in Bahir-Dar city outside a mosque during Ramadan prompting outcry from the Muslim community throughout Ethiopia. This incident prompted condemnation from the Islamic Affairs Council.

inflicting heavy casualties on the joint regime forces, including ENDF solders, state militias, and riot dispersal forces. In reprisal, joint regime forces shelled farming villages in Sequelt. The indiscriminate bombardment resulted in the destruction of numerous residential houses and the deaths of an unknown number of civilians. While the exact number of casualties is unclear it is known that many farmers were killed while inside their own homes, highlighting the grave and indiscriminate nature of the attack.

East Dembiya Woreda

- On May 17th a customs authority worker named Alamrew was detained by the local command post in Qoladiba town. While countless individuals have been apprehended and their fates remain uncertain, Alamrew's detention stands out due to his active role in revenue collection in East Dembiya Woreda.
- On May 17th, heavy gunfire erupted throughout the night in Qoladiba town after
 Fano forces seized weapons from the town administrator and his security detail.

 Over 670 state militias from various locations, including Maksegnit, Qoladiba,

 Wegera, and villages near Gonder city, have defected to Fano after issuing a formal apology to commander Fano Habte Wolde.
- On May 11th, an elderly man named Ato Fentaye Kassie (believed to be in his 70s) was forcibly removed from his residence and detained by regime forces in Addisge-Dinge Kebele of Qoladiba. Regime forces stated he was arrested because his son was suspected of affiliation with the Fano "rebel group". He was initially held in the local police station and then was transferred to the Qoladiba command post where he was extrajudicially killed. Further investigation revealed Ato Fentaye's son was a veteran of the self-defense campaign against TPLF's invasion of North Gonder and became injured and was sent abroad presumably for medical

treatment. The killing of Ato Fentaye shocked the local community and raised serious concerns about the arbitrary arrest and detention of countless individuals under the guise of supporting Fano.

West Belessa Woreda

A massacre orchestrated by the ENDF 51st army division resulted in the killing of more than 100 unarmed civilians in West Belessa Woreda. The division has since been dismantled by Fano forces, and its soldiers taken captive.

- Since May 14th heavy fighting between Fano and regime forces has been ongoing in Sankisa, Delgi, and Taqusa areas of West Belessa Woreda. Over 80 state militias have reportedly been killed, with many others captured or injured.
- Fighting has continued as of May 17th in Dikul-Arba Kebele, with regime forces suffering at least 34 combatant fatalities. In addition, regime forces killed at least five civilians including a 9-year-old child in Konkes village in Megenteya Kebele under pretext of being "Fano supporters". Regime forces left the bodies of the victims unburied in the village square for nearly an entire day to instill fear amongst local residents. The regime forces publicly proclaimed that the individuals had betrayed their comrades by providing intelligence and sustenance to Fano.

Alefa Woreda

- On May 19th, the regime's military command post mobilized its armed forces
 encamped in the ENDF North-Western Central Command in Azezo, Gonder city,
 deploying armored vehicles and tanks to support its encircled forces in Alefa and
 Taqusa Woredas.
- At the strategic Shawra Kebele of Sanqa-Ber, intense fighting took place for over 12 hours (2 am to 2 pm) between Fano and regime forces. Despite having superior

equipment, regime forces were outmaneuvered by the Fano and sustained many casualties. Afterwards, the Fano forces entered Shawra town while fighting in Sanqa-Ber continued. The surprise attack on reserve forces demoralized regime forces, forcing them to retreat. However, they faced relentless attacks from Gajet and other kebeles. The Sanqa-Ber battle was a resounding victory for Fano forces, demonstrating their ability to outmaneuver and outfight a numerically superior enemy. The capture of heavy weapons and ammunitions further boosted their morale and strengthened their position in the ongoing conflict.

South Gonder Zone

On May 19th, 2024, regime joint forces carried out a new series of coordinated attacks against Fano in Tach Gayint, Lay Gayint, Estie, Simada and Guna Begemidir Woredas. Regime forces launched an offensive from Sede-Muja towards Estie, Gayint, and Simada, aiming to engage Fano forces entrenched in Welela-Bahir. Despite the regime's superior equipment and training, Fano successfully repelled the attack, inflicting heavy casualties on the combined forces. The regime forces were forced to retreat to Welela-Bahir town, where they killed unarmed civilians under the accusation of supporting Fano.

Tach Gayint Woreda

• On May 19th, a fierce battle erupted in Gedoda Kebele of Tach Gayint Woreda between Fano forces led by commander Fano Kefyalew Dessie and joint regime forces. Intense fighting began at around 11:45 am and lasted over nine hours. The regime forces attempted to encircle the Fano forces in a four-pronged attack however the Fano were able to counter this strategy. They launched a daring offensive, catching the government forces off-guard. Despite being outnumbered and outgunned, the Fano incurred heavy casualties on the regime forces. At least 93 regime forces were killed and the remainder were injured and dispersed. The Fano

forces also captured a significant amount of equipment including two light-machineguns and four heavy-machineguns. In response, regime forces deployed additional military vehicles carrying four ZU-23s and reinforcements to the area.

Lay Gayint Woreda

• On May 13th, joint regime forces suddenly departed from Nefas-Mewcha town (Lay Gayint Woreda) and relocated to Meqet Woreda (North Wollo Zone) without prior notification to local authorities. The town's officials, including the cabinet, accompanied the military out of fear of being targeted by Fano forces operating in the area. Upon the regime forces' return to Nefas-Mewcha on May 15th, both military and civil authorities resettled, prompting directives for ordinary police to engage in military operations alongside riot dispersal forces and regular ENDF units against Fano forces. However, the police officers staunchly opposed this command.

Estie Woreda

• On May 16th at around 10 pm, Fano forces ambushed a military vehicle carrying soldiers from Mekane-Eyesus town to Debre-Tabor city near Lwaye village (Estie Woreda). Most of the regime forces were killed, with survivors sustaining injuries. The vehicle was completely destroyed and was removed at 2 pm in the evening. In a related development, a contingent of regime soldiers from Motta town (East Gojjam Zone) advanced towards Estie Woreda. However, as they traversed the Abay Desert, they were captured by Fano forces at Madoye Kebele without any exchange of gunfire. The captured soldiers, numbering over 27, were heavily armed with snipers, heavy-machineguns, and other small arms. The soldiers had reportedly refused orders from their local command post to engage in military operations against Fano and were attempting to withdraw from the conflict zone.

• On May 13th, Fano forces launched a surprise attack on the military camp located in Mekane-Eyesus town. The assault resulted in at least 6 regime soldiers killed in the attack, while over 10 others sustained injuries and are currently receiving treatment at Debre-Tabor Hospital.

Debre-Tabor city

- On May 18th at 12 pm, Fano forces carried out an ambush on regime forces
 escorting Estie officials on the main road connecting Estie and Gasay townships.
 More than 10 soldiers have been reportedly killed in this attack. The attack left
 numerous regime soldiers and military vehicles carrying local officials gravely
 wounded.
- In Debre-Tabor city, porters and daily wage laborers have been coerced into military training under false promises of daily payments of 2,000 birr. Numerous individuals have been transported to a military training camp located in Alem-Saga. It is believed the regime has resorted to coercion after facing difficulty in recruiting conscripts through regular means as the military has now been stigmatized throughout the region. Consequently, the regime has resorted to deceptive tactics to entice young people into joining the military in the region.
- On May 15th, over 17 state militias abandoned their posts in South Gonder Zone following an amnesty proclamation issued by Fano in the area. The militia members had persistently requested their release to return to farming as the season for farming their farmland approached. However, their requests were denied, with authorities claiming that their farmland would be cultivated by other farmers under orders from local officials.

Simada Woreda

- On May 18th, Fano forces carried out a surprise operation on state militias stationed at the Total Gas Station in Wegeda town of Simada Woreda. The attack resulted in heavy casualties among the state militia forces leaving many killed and wounded, and their heavy weapons and small arms were captured. In the wake of the attack, surviving state militias faced accusations of incompetence and dereliction of duty by the local military command post. Since May 19th regime forces seeking to restore the status quo have been detaining a number of state militias causing suspicion and mistrust within the regime's security apparatus.
- Over 34 state militia members abandoned the conflict zone and returned to their families following an amnesty declared by Amhara Fano Gonder.
- On May 14th, regime forces raped a pregnant woman in Sherfa-Gode or Aba-Bula
 Kebele of Simada Woreda. The horrific rape occurred in the presence of her
 10-year-old son. When news of the incident spread to the community, regime
 military authorities summoned the aggrieved woman and ordered her to identify her
 assailant amidst a throng of uniformed personnel. The issue caused her
 psychological anguish.
- On May 13th, regime security personnel under command of Ato Adgo Chanie
 (Zonal Administrator of Water and Mining) shot at unarmed farmers irrigating
 harvests in the village of Bazra-Meda Kebele. After the shooting, sixteen women
 were taken hostage and their families were accused of sympathizing with the Fano
 movement. The abductors told the captives they would only be released if the Fano
 they were allegedly supporting surrendered.
 - Acts of collective punishment are prohibited by the Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocols. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention

unequivocally states that "collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited." Article 1 of Protocol I to the Geneva Convention reinforces this prohibition, declaring that "collective punishments are prohibited and shall not be inflicted." The perpetrators of this atrocity violated not only the lives of their victims but also the fundamental principles of humanity and the rule of law. Their actions serve as a stark reminder that even in the face of conflict or strife, the dignity and rights of all individuals must be upheld.

Guna-Begemidir Woreda

- On May 18th, over a dozen state militias in Farta Kebele of Guna Begemidir
 Woreda abandoned the conflict zone, seeking refuge in their homes with their
 equipment intact. This mass desertion further weakened the regime's control on the
 area and indicated the weakness in morale and loyalty of the forces.
- On the night of May 15th, another dozen state militias deserted from their posts along with their weapons in Kimir-Dingay town of Guna-Begemidir Woreda.
 Sources speculate the deserters may have joined local Fano in the area.

Ibnat and Mena-Meqetewa Woredas

• On May 11th, intense fighting broke out between joint regime forces and Fano forces in Ibnat Woreda. The fighting began when the regime forces marched towards Selamaya town with an objective to strike at a suspected Fano positions in Mena-Meqetewa Woreda. However, Fano launched a counteroffensive against the joint regime forces near Selamaya town. In a lightning-fast assault, Fano forces overwhelmed the regime forces capturing over 33 regime soldiers and seizing a significant cache of weapons, including more than 200 kalashnikov rifles, 4 light machine-guns, and one heavy machine-gun. Afterwards, Fano took control of

Selamaya town and regime forces were forced to retreat to Ibnat town. Despite repeated attempts to dislodge Fano from Mena Meqetewa, the regime forces encountered fierce resistance. On May 13th, the regime forces were forced to abandon their offensive and regroup in Ibnat, their morale shaken by the unexpected defeat.

Welkait Tegede Setit Humera Zone

- On May 17th over ten TPLF operatives were apprehended during a plot to assassinate authorities of the Welkait Tegede Setit Humera Zone. The operatives were led by Colonel Werqaynu, a renowned TPLF commander, and the operatives confessed to detonating four bombs in Tegede and Dansha. Authorities seized 14 additional undetonated bombs in their possession. The primary target of the operation was Colonel Demeke Zewdu, along with other prominent figures in the zonal administration.
- In Bereket, near the Amhara-Sudan border, the Samri TPLF squad which had been based in a UNHCR camp. The TPLF militants have been conducting training exercises involving heavy weapons and small arms in Shererina village. The operatives, who had taken refuge in Sudanese refugee camps, underwent rigorous training for approximately five hours. It is estimated that over 36,000 well-equipped TPLF fighters reside in these camps.

Horo Guduru Wollega Zone (Oromia Region)

Abe Dongoro Woreda

On May 14th, regime forces launched an attack on Amhara residents in Wubanchi
Kebele of Abe Dongoro Woreda. The attack began early in the morning, targeting
armed farmers in the village. In response, local volunteer fighters counterattacked in

self-defense causing significant casualties among the regime soldiers and compelling them to retreat. Subsequently, regime forces attempted to reinforce its troops but encountered internal discord, preventing further aggression. Presently, the situation has calmed down and no civilian causalities were reported in the incident.

About the Amhara Association of America (AAA)

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) is a non-profit civic organization based in Charlotte, North Carolina that investigates and documents human rights violations in the context of conflict, violence and political repression in Ethiopia. AAA seeks to inform U.S. policymakers, international human rights organizations, journalists, researchers, and all Ethiopian stakeholders to pressure Ethiopian leaders to change laws, policies, and practices in Ethiopia so perpetrators are held accountable and victims receive justice. AAA also collaborates with Amhara organizations in the U.S., supports independent Amhara organizations in Ethiopia, and provides humanitarian aid for Amharas impacted due to targeted ethnic attacks. AAA's funding comes directly from members and supporters; the organization is not affiliated with any Ethiopian or American political or governmental entities.

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