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EDUCATION UNDER SIEGE: THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN THE ONGOING AMHARA WAR IN ETHIOPIA

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INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

This report was prepared by the Amhara Association of America (AAA) to provide a high-level overview on the status of education in Amhara Region of Ethiopia amidst nearly 2 years of war in the region. Specifically, the ongoing armed conflict between armed forces allied to the Oromo Prosperity Party (OPP) regime (regime forces) and those of the Amhara Fano self-defense force (Fano) has been followed by widespread disruptions of essential services and provisions for residents of the region. Reports from various other sources have also indicated a pattern of violations of international law by regime forces which has impacted civilians across Amhara Region and surrounding areas.¹²³

More than 9 million children in Ethiopia are out of school, primarily due to conflict, violence, natural disasters, and displacement.⁴ The regions most affected are Amhara (4.4 million), Oromia (3.2 million), and Tigray (1.2 million). Additionally, over 6,000 schools have been forced to close, while more than 10,000 schools—18% of the country's total—have been damaged by conflict and climate-related events, severely limiting access to safe and functional learning environments. The current report seeks to highlight trends associated with this large-scale crisis.

Based on information gathered from 11 zonal administrations (four sub-regions) in Amhara Region, as a result of the ongoing war in the region, over 5,231 schools (65.1% of available schools) are no longer operational accounting for more than 3.5 million children out of school. The ongoing war has also left 1,390 schools damaged while over 830 schools have been repurposed for military use. It is noteworthy that data from several zonal administrations were unavailable, therefore the actual extent of educational disruptions, impacts on students and related outcomes is greater than those in this report.

¹ See September 17, 2024 [summary report](#) from the Amhara Association of America (AAA).

² See October 14, 2024 [report](#) from Mail & Guardian.

³ See December 29, 2023 [report](#) from Al Jazeera English.

⁴ See January 2, 2025 [report](#) from UNICEF Ethiopia Humanitarian Situation Report.

REPORT

METHODOLOGY

This report details the status of education services in various parts of the Amhara Region in the context of the ongoing war in the region. The data contained in this report was obtained from a combination of primary and secondary sources including school administrators, NGOs working in the education sector and other sources obtained from locally-based investigators employed by AAA. Information was also gathered from official statements, media reports, documentation from national and international human rights organizations, and testimonials from individuals directly impacted by educational disruptions in war-affected areas of Amhara Region.

It is noteworthy that data gathering efforts for the purposes of compiling this report were hindered by ongoing security concerns including ongoing armed conflict both in urban and rural areas. The nature of the conflict has created reluctance from some contacts who withheld information out of fear of potential reprisal particularly from regime forces.

Table 1: Summary of Shutdowns of Educational Facilities and Toll on Students across Various Sub-regions in Amhara Region

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the educational facilities across areas of Amhara Region for which partial or comprehensive data were available. This data set includes the number of schools that have closed, schools that have opened, the total number of enrolled students, the number of students who are currently out of school, the number of schools repurposed for military purposes and the number of schools damaged from heavy artillery shelling, drone strikes and similar causes.

No.	Sub-Region/ Zone	No. Zones	No. Available Schools	No. Closed Schools	No. Operational Schools	No. Students Enrolled	No. Students Out of School	No. Schools Repurpo sed for Military Use	No. Schools Damaged
1	North Shewa	1	1,021	843	178	102,406	484,991	-	259
2	North Wollo	1	1,210	392	818	161,086	188,000	155	263
3	Gonder	4	2,992	1,693	1,250	729,219	1,176,629	600	417
4	Gojjam	5	2,811	2,303	508	337,000	1,650,000	75	230
TOTAL		11	8,034	5,231	2,754	1,329,711	3,499,620	830	1,169

BACKGROUND

Political Context

The right to education, a fundamental right enshrined in both international law and domestic law, is currently facing severe challenges in the Amhara Region. The region has been embroiled in war since 2020—first as part of the Northern Ethiopia War between the OPP regime and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), and since late April 2023 in the ongoing armed conflict between the Fano and regime forces.

At the center of this war is the continued targeted killing and arrest of Amharas across Ethiopia, a pattern that has persisted for decades but has intensified and become more widespread since Abiy Ahmed came to power.⁵ After years of pleas and civil resistance, Abiy Ahmed’s crackdown on those advocating to end the genocide in Oromia—including mass arrests and the declaration of the disbandment of Amhara Special Forces and disarmament of Fano in April 2023—forced Amharas to defend their right to life through armed resistance. Fano, a traditional Amhara practice of self-defense in times of aggression when the state fails to protect them, has since emerged as a grassroots fighting force against the OPP regime.

While the war in northern Ethiopia was largely confined to select zones adjacent to the Tigray Region, the war on Amhara since 2023 has spread across every district of the Amhara Region. Hundreds of battles have taken place each month, with frequent use of drones targeting social service centers - including schools, healthcare facilities, religious institutions, and other public spaces. According to AAA, at least 5,052 civilians were killed or injured between August 2023 and December 2024, including 3,935 fatalities and 1,117 injuries caused by regime forces including the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and allied forces.⁶ Drones and airstrikes alone accounted for 1,076 casualties, including 823 deaths. However, the actual number of casualties is believed to be significantly higher than AAA’s recorded figures.

Since the OPP regime’s declaration of a state of emergency in August 2023, the educational landscape in the Amhara Region has been profoundly affected, preventing millions of children from attending school.⁷ In the previous academic year, armed conflict led to the closure of numerous schools across the region.⁸ This situation has persisted

⁵ See August 4, 2023 [op-ed article](#) on African Arguments.

⁶ See January 29, 2025 [interview](#) on CIVICUS Lens.

⁷ See June 8, 2024 [report](#) from Deutsche Welle Amharic.

⁸ See August 10, 2024 [report](#) from BBC Amharic.

into the current academic year, with many schools remaining closed and only a few operating under extremely challenging conditions.⁹ Educational institutions have been severely impacted, with many either repurposed as military outposts or directly targeted in military attacks. The widespread closure of schools has had devastating consequences for youth and families, exacerbating existing inequalities and disrupting prospects of current and future generations. Certain areas and woredas have been disproportionately affected, with some districts experiencing a near-total shutdown of educational services.



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A Classroom in Mersa Elementary School in Mersa town that was occupied by Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) militants during their invasion on North Wollo Zone (Amhara Region) in 2021



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A Library in Mersa Elementary School in Mersa town that was occupied by Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) militants during their invasion of North Wollo Zone in Amhara Region (taken in January 12, 2022)

⁹ See January 23, 2025 [report](#) from The Conversation.

OVERVIEW

North Shewa Zone (South-Eastern Amhara)

Student Enrollment and Educational Continuity

In the 2024/2025 (2017 EC) school year, approximately 587,397 students were expected to continue their education in North Shewa Zone (South-Eastern Amhara). However, only 102,406 students have managed to resume their schooling, either fully or partially. This leaves 484,991 students out of school, representing a significant gap in educational continuity.

Table 2: Status of Educational Facilities in North Shewa Zone in South-Eastern Amhara Region.

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the educational facilities within North Shewa Zone (South-Eastern Amhara Region). This data set includes the number of schools that have closed, schools that have opened, the total number of enrolled students, and the number of students who are currently out of school.

No.	Zone	No. Available Schools	No. Closed Schools	No. Operational Schools	No. Students Enrolled	No. Students Out of School
1	North Shewa	1,021	843	178	102,406	484,991

Impact of Prolonged School Closures on Students and Families

The North Shewa Zone, including Dera Woreda, has experienced significant disruptions in its education system.¹⁰ Prior to the crisis, the zone had 1,021 schools. However, as of the latest reports, only 119 primary and 59 secondary schools remain open and operational. The remaining 843 schools (82.6%) are out of service, many of which are currently being repurposed for military use. For instance, Menz-Mama Secondary School, Tarma-Ber, and Keyit schools have been transformed into military encampments by regime forces.

In addition to schools being out of operation, 259 schools have been destroyed or severely damaged due to heavy weapons and drone strikes, further exacerbating the situation. This destruction has consequently left thousands of students without access to education.

¹⁰ Dera Woreda is an Amhara majority district which was annexed to the Oromia Regional Administration.

The closure of schools has caused severe psychological and social distress among students and their families.

- One parent, Tebeje (name changed for security reasons), shared the long-term impact on his children, noting that many students have lost hope of continuing their education. As a result, some have joined Fano, while others have been forcefully conscripted by regime forces. According to Tebeje, the youth are being trained for military engagement rather than professional careers such as doctors, teachers, or engineers.
- Tigist (name changed), a resident of Shewa-Robit city, also expressed the frustration felt by many students. She stated that under the current circumstances, pursuing an education and achieving success seems impossible. Many students, she noted, are contemplating migrating abroad, particularly to the Middle East in search of better opportunities.

The prolonged closure of schools, the widespread absence of students, the destruction of educational facilities, and the resulting psychological and social crises will have far-reaching effects on the Amhara Region and the country as a whole. In the long-term, the region faces the risk of a generation without formal education. This will likely lead to widespread illiteracy and a lack of skilled professionals, further contributing to rising unemployment, insecurity, and political instability. The region may also face an increase in crime rates, as the lack of education and economic opportunities will leave many young people vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

The education crisis in North Shewa Zone presents a critical challenge to the future of the region. Immediate efforts to restore access to education, provide psychological support, and address social impacts of this crisis are necessary to mitigate the long-term consequences for students, families, and the broader community.

OVERVIEW

North Wollo Zone (North-Eastern Amhara)

This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of education in North Wollo Zone of North-Eastern Amhara Region which includes areas formerly under Amhara Region administration but which fell under control of Tigray Region forces including the Alamata city administration, Raya-Alamata Woreda and Ofla Woreda.¹¹

Student Enrollment and Educational Continuity

Reports indicate that over 392 schools in the zone are currently closed. The situation remains fluid, and sources, including regime officials, have stated that this number is likely to increase as the conflict persists. In addition, many schools have experienced intermittent openings and closings, further exacerbating the instability of the education system. As a result, over 188,000 students are currently out of school. Officials have warned that this number will continue to rise as more schools are forced to shut down or operate irregularly.

Table 3: Status of Educational Facilities in North Wollo Zone in North-Eastern Amhara Region.

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the educational facilities within North Wollo Zone (North-Eastern Amhara Region). This data set includes the number of schools that have closed, schools that have opened, the total number of enrolled students, and the number of students who are currently out of school.

No.	Zone	No. Available Schools	No. Closed Schools	No. Operational Schools	No. Students Enrolled	No. Students Out of School
1	North Wollo	1,210	392	818	161,086	188,000

Damage to Schools and Repurposing of Educational Facilities as Military Outposts

In addition to closures, the ongoing conflict has led to the destruction of educational

¹¹ Tigray Region Forces comprise militants affiliated to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Tigray Interim Regional Administration.

infrastructure. A total of 263 schools have been damaged across Alamata city and Raya-Alamata, Lasta, Kobo city, Raya-Kobo, Gidan, Habru, Angot, Gubalafto, Gazo, Dawunt, and Wadla Woreda administrations. Many of these schools have also been repurposed for military use. At least 155 schools are currently being used as military camps, with schools occupied by regime forces and TPLF militants, while others have been used by internally displaced persons who escaped ethnic-based violence in western Oromia Region.

Impact of Prolonged School Closures on Students and Families

The education system has faced immense challenges, with numerous schools closed, widespread student displacement, and damage to educational infrastructure, leading to significant disruptions in the educational lives of children.

The widespread disruption in education is having profound social, economic, security, and political consequences for residents of North Wollo Zone (North-Eastern Amhara Region). As students miss out on their education, they are deprived of future opportunities, aspirations, and dreams. Many are at risk of falling victim to human trafficking, with many resorting to migration abroad in search of work.

- Abeba (name changed), a grade 11 student from Raya-Kobo Woreda, shared her personal experience. Several months ago, she left her home and migrated illegally to Saudi Arabia. During her journey, Abeba spent over \$3,000 and endured hardships, including spending time in Yemen. She witnessed the exploitation and abuse of other girls along the way, including rape and violence. Abeba attributes her migration, and the suffering of many others, to the lack of education in her community, which left her and her peers with limited options for the future.
- One father of five children, all students ranging from kindergarten to university, expressed his despair. He described how his three older children, who had once been top students in their schools, are now out of school and have lost hope. Instead of focusing on their education, they are now considering joining militant groups. This loss of hope reflects the broader psychological and social toll that the educational crisis has on students and their families.

The ongoing closure of schools and disruption of education in North Wollo Zone is leading to severe long-term consequences. The current generation of children, without access to education, will face limited prospects. They may be predisposed to militancy, migration, crime, and unemployment, contributing to broader instability in the region. Lack of access to education is not only a crisis for children but also for the future development and security of the entire community.

OVERVIEW

Gojjam Sub-Region (South-Western/South-Central Amhara)

This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of education in the Gojjam sub-region of south-western/south-central Amhara Region which includes the Bahir-Dar city administration and the East Gojjam, West Gojjam, Awi and North Gojjam Zones. In the Gojjam sub-region, educational facilities, ranging from kindergartens to higher education institutions, have experienced closures, delayed openings, and outright destruction since the onset of hostilities in Amhara Region.

Student Enrollment and Educational Continuity

Reports indicate that over 2,303 schools remain closed in the Gojjam sub-region alone, other than kindergartens and higher education institutions, which have also been out of operation for over a year. This closure has left more than 1.6 million students without access to education for an extended period.

The investigation into the current state of education in the Gojjam sub-region has revealed significant geographical disparities in the closure of schools. Accordingly, it appears that educational facilities are currently operational only in the regional capital, zonal cities, and select woreda towns. This situation has led to a concentration of students in these limited areas, while even urban centers have faced frequent disruptions due to sporadic gunfire.

As compared to urban areas, many educational facilities in rural regions have seen a significant number of schools fail to reopen, as they are frequently afflicted by violence and lack of access to government services.

Table 4: Status of Educational Facilities in Gojjam Sub-Region in South-Western/South-Central Amhara Region.

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the educational facilities within the Gojjam sub-region (South-Western/South-Central Amhara Region), categorized by zonal administration. This data set includes the number of schools that have closed, schools that have opened, the total number of enrolled students, and the number of students who are currently out of school

No.	Zone	No. Available Schools	No. Closed Schools	No. Schools Operational	No. Students Enrolled	No. Students Out of School
1	East Gojjam	996	882	114	52,000	640,000
2	West Gojjam	600	560	40	30,000	350,000
3	Awi	612	378	234	150,000	300,000
4	North Gojjam	503	470	33	30,000	350,000
5	Bahir-Dar city	100	13	87	75,000	10,000
Total		2,811	2,303	508	337,000	1,650,000

As shown in table above, in East Gojjam Zone, official statements indicate the presence of 996 educational institutions, excluding kindergartens and higher education facilities. Out of these, 882 primary and secondary schools have been closed, while the remaining 114 schools resumed operation. Notably, the woredas of Sinan, Debre-Elias, and Gozamin have not reopened any schools, causing the entire population of students in these woredas to be out of school. The educational facilities which resumed functioning are those schools located only in select towns, such as Debre-Markos, Motta, Ye-jube, Dejen, and Debre-Werk. Additionally, in the East Gojjam Zone, a significant number of available kindergartens, technical colleges, and vocational training centers are also non-operational. Overall, widespread closure of schools in the East Gojjam Zone has led to an estimated 640,000 students being unable to attend school. Official statements also indicate that over 5,000 teachers have been out of work from East Gojjam Zone alone.

In West Gojjam Zone, official statements indicate the presence of nearly 600 schools, again excluding kindergartens and higher education institutions. More than 560 of these schools have been closed, leaving fewer than 40 still functioning. The woredas of Sekela, Dega-Damot, and Quarit are particularly affected, as there is no single school that has started operations. Educational facilities are currently operational only in select towns, including Finote-Selam, Bure, and Dembecha. Like their counterparts in East Gojjam Zone, many kindergartens and technical colleges in West Gojjam Zone are also inactive, contributing to an estimated 350,000 students being out of school in this zone.

In the Awi Zone, official statements indicate the presence of 612 schools, excluding kindergartens and higher education institutions. Out of these, over 378 schools have been closed, with only 234 schools resuming operations. The woredas of Guagusa-Shikudad, Jawi, and Fagita-Lekoma are particularly affected, having the lowest number of schools that have been functioning. Reports indicate that educational facilities are functioning in a few towns, such as Injibara, Chagni, and Dangila. As with the other zones, numer-

-ous kindergartens and technical colleges in Awi Zone are currently non-operational, leading to an estimated 300,000 students being unable to access education.

In the North Gojjam Zone, there are at least 503 schools, excluding kindergartens and higher education institutions. More than 470 of these schools remain closed, with only 33 schools currently operational. The woredas of South Achefer, North Achefer, South Mecha and Gonji-Qolela are particularly affected, having the lowest number of schools that started functioning in this zonal administration. Reports indicate that educational facilities have begun to function in a few towns, including Merawi, Adet, Liben, and Durbete. Similar to the other zones, many kindergartens and technical colleges in North Gojjam Zone are still inactive, resulting in an estimated 350,000 students being out of school.

In contrast to other zones in the Gojjam sub-region, the Bahir Dar city administration has maintained a more stable educational environment since the onset of the war. Official reports indicate that there are over 100 public and private schools in the city, many of which have continued to operate despite facing occasional disruptions due to the ongoing conflict. However, 13 schools within the Bahir-Dar city administration remain closed, resulting in approximately 10,000 students being out of school. These closures have primarily affected schools located in the suburbs that were recently integrated into the city administration. Additionally, schools in Bahir-Dar city are characterized by hosting students displaced from the surrounding Gojjam and Gonder sub-regions, which has placed additional demands on resources.

Repurposing of Educational Facilities as Military Outposts

Another pressing concern is the alarming trend of repurposing educational facilities as military bases. In the Gojjam sub-region (South-Western/South-Central Amhara Region), numerous schools have been repurposed for use by regime forces, particularly in the context of military occupation. The extent and nature of this militarization of educational institutions have varied over time and across different locations, affecting both urban centers and rural areas. Particularly in areas where formal military installations are lacking, regime forces have frequently turned to schools as their primary option for establishing temporary landing camps.

Investigations have revealed that, at various points, regime forces have converted at least 75 schools into military encampments throughout the Gojjam sub-region, significantly disrupting the educational environment within local communities. Notable cases of this troubling trend include the use of primary schools and secondary schools as military outposts, as well as several technical and vocational training institutions. Furthermore, in instances where schools are not directly utilized as military outposts,

regime military camps are often established in close proximity to these educational facilities.

This alarming situation has contributed to a breakdown of the educational system, profoundly affecting the lives of both students and teachers. The militarization of schools has created an atmosphere of fear and instability within communities, leading to a reluctance among parents to send their children to school and hindering the ability of educators to provide a safe and effective learning environment.

Table 5: Examples of Educational Facilities Converted to Regime Military Camps at Various Times in Gojjam Sub-region (South-Western/South-Central Amhara Region).

No.	Name of School	Location
1	Alemayehu Bezabih and Liyew Asres Schools	Digo-Tsiyon town
2	Waber High School	Waber town
3	Abay Minch High School	Gishabay town
4	Two Public Schools	Durbeti town
5	Yedoha Public School	Shebel-Berenta Woreda
6	Belay Zeleke Preparatory School	Bichena town
7	Merto-Lemariam Agricultural Education College	Mero-Lemariam town
8	Ginde-Weyn TVT College	Ginde-Weyn town
9	Dega-Damot TVT College	Dega-Damot Woreda
10	Gubiya Primary and Secondary Schools	Dejen Woreda
11	Jumarie Primary and Two Other Public Secondary Schools	Dega-Damot Woreda
12	Tilili TVT College	Tilili town
13	Damot TVT College	Finote-Selam city

Documented Incidents of Attacks on Educational Facilities

- Throughout the armed conflict there have been reports of regime forces deliberately targeting school buildings for military advantage, leading to widespread destruction throughout the Gojjam sub-region (South-Western/South-Central Amhara Region). The types of attacks that the regime forces employed to target schools include artillery, drone/air strikes, and setting school buildings on fire. In such attacks, an estimated 230 schools have been attacked by regime forces with the level of destruction varying across these institutions.
- Investigations over the reported incidents reveal that schools have been frequently subjected to attacks by drone strikes and air assaults. Reports indicate that a minimum of 12 schools have been targeted in drone strikes. Notable examples are Dima-

ma-Angeref and Fagita Elementary Schools in Fagita-Lekoma Woreda (Awi Zone), Afesa Secondary School in Dangila Woreda (Awi Zone), and Yekegat Secondary School in Debre-Elias Woreda (East Gojjam Zone) among the schools which have been directly targeted by drone attacks.

- Targeting of schools by large artillery attacks has also resulted in the destruction of many schools. The notable incidents include the burning of Abadra Elementary School in Dangila Woreda (Awi Zone), the destruction of Nibrete Bizuneh School in South Mecha Woreda (North Gojjam Zone), and the demolition of two private colleges in Debre-Markos city (East Gojjam Zone) by heavy artillery.

Table 6: Instances of Attacks on Educational Facilities in the Gojjam Sub-Region Detailing the Location, Date and Types of Attack.

No.	School Name	Woreda	Zone	Date of Incident	Nature of Attack
1	Nibrete Bizuneh Secondary School	South Mecha	North Gojjam	24-Feb-24	Shelling
2	Qezqez Primary School	Awabel	East Gojjam	19-June-24	Fire
3	Dimama-Angeref Primary School	Fagita-Lekoma	Awi	25-Sep-24	Drone strike
4	Dagi Primary School	North Mecha	North Gojjam	7-Oct-24	Drone strike
5	Qolela Primary School	North Mecha	North Gojjam	8-Oct-24	Drone strike
6	St. John's Primary School	South Mecha	North Gojjam	12-Oct-24	Drone strike
7	Asteriyo Primary School	Hulet-Eju-Enbese	East Gojjam	15-Oct-24	Drone strike
8	Afesa Secondary School	Dangila	Awi	17-Oct-24	Drone strike
9	Yekegat Secondary School	Debre-Elias	East Gojjam	22-Oct-24	Drone strike
10	Neway-Mariam Primary School	Enarj-Enawga	East Gojjam	22-Oct-24	Drone strike
11	Zibist Primary School	South Achefer	North Gojjam	5-Nov-24	Drone strike
12	Biradama Primary School	Quarit	West Gojjam	9-Nov-24	Drone strike
13	Abadra Primary School	Dangila	Awi	19-Nov-24	Fire
14	Gobata Primary School	North Mecha	North Gojjam	29-Nov-24	Explosive
15	Genet-Abo Secondary School	Quarit	West Gojjam	7-Dec-24	Fire
16	Fagita Primary School	Fagita-Lekoma	Awi	9-Dec-24	Drone strike
17	Maksegnit Primary School	Sekela	West Gojjam	24-Dec-24	Drone strike

Impact of Prolonged School Closures on Students and Families

- Testimonies from affected students and their families reveal the profound emotional, academic, and social difficulties stemming from the ongoing conflict. Many young people report that the fear of violence and instability overshadows their

desire to learn. The prolonged school closures have left many students feeling hopeless and disengaged from their education, causing them to forget much of what they had previously learned. This situation has forced some students to consider finding work to support their families instead of returning to school. Furthermore, there are alarming trends, particularly among female students, who feel pressured to enter early marriages as a means of securing their livelihoods.

- Some families have struggled to cope with the decisions of their children who opted to join the armed conflict or seek refuge in remote locations, driven by a sense of hopelessness regarding the possibility of resuming their education. In addition, other parents described being in chronic distress as they grapple with the difficult decision of whether to send their children to school, especially when authorities pressure them to do so. This dilemma primarily affects families living in areas where conflict frequently occurs and where schools have become converted into regime military camps, creating a climate of fear and uncertainty. Parents are caught between the desire for their children to receive an education and their concerns for their safety.
- As a result of the ongoing conflict, many families are relocating to urban centers in search of safety and educational opportunities. Students are increasingly inclined to remain in towns and cities where they perceive relative stability, educational prospects, and employment opportunities. Additionally, the consequences of displacement have created a climate of fear and anxiety among families, affecting their children's willingness to return to school. Parents expressed concerns about their children's safety and the long-term implications of prolonged educational disruption.



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A Classroom in Mersa Elementary School in Mersa town that was occupied by Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) militants during their invasion of North Wollo Zone in Amhara Region (taken in January 12, 2022)

OVERVIEW

Gonder Sub-Region (North-Western Amhara)

This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of education in the Gonder sub-region (North-Western Amhara Region) which includes the South Gonder, Central Gonder, West Gonder, North Gonder and Welkait-Tegede-Setit Humera Zones. The situation in the Welkait-Tegede-Setit Humera Zone has been relatively stable during the reporting period (with exception of some skirmishes) and educational facilities are reportedly operational.

Student Enrollment and Educational Continuity

This section provides an overview of the status of school registration and enrollment across four zones in the Gonder sub-region (North-Western Amhara Region). Data reflects the number of schools, their operational status, enrollment figures, and related statistics. The zones covered are South Gonder, Central Gonder, West Gonder, and North Gonder Zones. It is crucial to note that reported registration figures do not necessarily indicate that schools have fully commenced operationalization of education. Teachers were instructed to conduct house-to-house enrollment across the entire Gonder sub-region by regime political cadres, meaning registered numbers may not reflect actual attendance. Furthermore, a significant challenge hindering the operationalization of schools, particularly in rural areas, is the fact that many are being utilized as temporary military camps by regime forces.

Table 7: Status of Educational Facilities in Gonder Sub-Region in North-Western Amhara Region.

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the educational facilities within the Gonder sub-region (North-Western Amhara Region), categorized by zonal administration. This data set includes the number of schools that have closed, schools that have opened, the total number of enrolled students, and the number of students who are currently out of school.

No.	Zone	No. Available Schools	No. Closed Schools	No. Schools Operational	No. Students Enrolled	No. Students Out of School
1	South Gonder	1,173	639	485	189,604	387,000
2	Central Gonder	1,071	866	205	230,000	595,000
3	West Gonder	258	78	180	138,422	80,869
4	North Gonder	490	110	380	171,193	113,760
Total		2,992	1,693	1,250	729,219	1,176,629

Notes:-

***Enrollment:** It is important to consider that the registration figures may be inflated due to the house-to-house enrollment directive.

***Operationalization:** The operational status of rural schools in several of these zones is severely affected by their use as temporary military camps.

Impact of Prolonged School Closures on Students and Families

- The dire situation in the Gonder sub-region has forced many students out of classrooms and into precarious circumstances, exposing them to exploitation, violence, and profound psychological distress.
- In South Gonder Zone, numerous students, deprived of educational opportunities, have sought daily labor opportunities in areas like Fogera Woreda and Metemma Woreda (West Gonder Zone) to support themselves and their families. However, this pursuit of work has proven to be exceedingly dangerous. Alarming, many of these young laborers, particularly those in Debre-Tabor city and Fogera Woreda, have been forcibly conscripted into military training by regime forces. The parents of these students are in a state of complete despair, with some even receiving news of their children's deaths following military training. Even students who remained with their families, diligently assisting in farming activities, have not been spared from forced recruitment, facing insurmountable obstacles to avoid being swept into military service. These parents expressed deep hopelessness regarding their children's future, witnessing the grim reality of their children's lives in such terrible conditions.
- In a further tragic development, students who ventured to Metemma Woreda (West Gonder Zone) faced extreme violence, with many being killed by regime forces under pretext of being associated with Fano fighters. A few students managed to return home, but these survivors are grappling with profound psychological trauma, haunted by the gruesome deaths of their friends and their own near-death experiences.
- Parents in Central Gonder Zone have also expressed profound anxiety about the future of their children, as they see them idle, with no access to regular schooling. They harbor deep skepticism regarding the regime's promises of reopening schools, especially in light of indiscriminate drone strikes on educational institutions. Moreover, students in this zone are not immune to forced conscription.
- In West Gonder Zone, the initial promise of resuming schooling was swiftly shattered. Although schools had started functioning briefly, escalating conflict between Fano fighters and regime forces have led to immediate school closures.

- Furthermore, a large number of students in this zone have been arbitrarily detained by regime forces on charges of assisting Fano fighters. Tragically, many of these detained students were subsequently transferred to the notorious Seraba military training center.
- Even in North Gonder Zone, the reach of forced recruitment has been palpable, with students targeted while returning home from school. This pattern of student conscription appears to be a calculated strategy by regime forces.

Damage to Schools and Repurposing of Educational Facilities as Military Outposts

Across the Gonder sub-region, the educational infrastructure has suffered extensive damage as a result of the ongoing armed conflict. Regime forces in particular have displayed a pattern of intentionally targeting schools. Across the sub-region over 600 schools have been repurposed for military use and 417 schools have sustained damages from attacks by regime forces.

The situation is particularly dire in the South Gonder Zone.

- The repurposing of schools for military use has been a significant factor in preventing students from accessing education, with 225 schools in the zone having been converted into military camps. Additionally, these schools suffered damage as a direct result of their forced conversion into military camps. The damage caused by the conflict is further compounded by the destruction caused by aerial attacks, where 45 schools in South Gonder Zone were destroyed by drone strikes, and another 89 were damaged by heavy weapons shelling by regime forces.
- In Mena-Mequetewa Woreda, two high schools and three primary schools in Aysa town are now unusable; their furniture systematically repurposed as cooking fuel, making the resumption of classes impossible. A similar fate befell schools in Aja, where the desks and chairs of two high schools and one primary school were burned for cooking and heating. The Selamaya High School in Dega-Melza also fell victim to this systematic destruction, with donated computers stolen and chairs burned by regime forces.
- The vocational school in Kimir-Dingay town, located in Guna-Begemidir Woreda, has been converted into a military camp after regime forces burned its desks and chairs. Further demonstrating the deliberate nature of these attacks, two high schools and four primary schools in Hagere-Genet town (Lay-Gayint Woreda) were destroyed in drone strikes. The Alem-Ber Highschool had been destroyed with heavy weapon shelling. This pattern of destruction extends across other woredas including Simada, Tach-Gayint, Estie, and Sede-Muja, where regime forces have deliberately set fire to all

school furniture. Two schools in Mahderemaryam town and Werqe Kebele were heavily shelled, while the Mikael-Debir Highschool was destroyed by a drone strike. Schools in Ambo-Meda town and Degoma town were also burned and used for military purposes. Schools in Maserodenb town were also destroyed in a drone strike. The school in Dil-Ber town has been struck by heavy artillery.

In Central Gonder Zone, the misuse of school facilities for military purposes has also caused serious damage.

- A total of 287 schools, including vocational and technical schools, have been repurposed for use as military camps. These schools suffered various damages, with school property burned by regime forces when they converted the schools for use as camps.
- The destruction from air attacks is further devastating, as 89 schools were struck by drone attacks and another 157 were shelled with heavy weapons by regime forces.
- Destruction also took place in East Dembiya Woreda, including of the newly opened Simra-Tekeza Primary School, two schools in Chandiba town, a high school in Ayimba town, and a high school in Guramba Kebele which were destroyed with heavy artillery and drone strikes. In West Dembiya, Alefa, Takusa, East Belessa, West Belessa Woredas, widespread destruction of school properties was reported.

In North Gonder and West Gonder Zones, 60 schools and 28 schools have been repurposed for temporary military camps by regime forces, respectively.

- Across these 88 schools, regime forces used desks and chairs for fuel and cooking.
- Furthermore, in West Gonder Zone, 27 schools were damaged by drone strikes, and another 10 schools were struck with drones in North Gonder Zone.
- A further 23 schools in West Gonder Zone and 40 in North Gonder Zone were damaged by heavy weapon shelling.
- In Telemt Woreda, 24 schools have been used as military camps, shared by both regime forces and TPLF militants. It has been reported that all schools, with the exception of those repurposed for military purposes, have resumed classes this academic year.

CONCLUSIONS

This report underscores the severe deterioration of the education system in the Amhara Region, where access to education has been drastically hindered by the war initiated by the Abiy Ahmed-led OPP regime. The deliberate targeting of schools and their conversion into military outposts has left nearly 60% of students without access to education, while displacement and fear from the ongoing conflict further exacerbate the crisis.

Reported regional student registration figures may be misleading as areas with non-operational schools or insecurity still hinder student enrollment. In addition, reports of coercion of efforts to bolster registration/enrollment figures further casts doubt on actual student attendance. Overall, further investigation is needed to address disparities between registration and enrollment figures.

Furthermore, concerns remain over the quality of provision of education due to inconsistent attendance, poverty, inadequate infrastructure, a lack of essential materials, and overcrowded classrooms.

The prolonged war in the Amhara Region threatens future prospects of generations of children with significant implications for development at a regional and national level. Urgent intervention from all stakeholders is imperative to ensure protection for students and educational facilities, foster an environment conducive to provision of education and to safeguard the prospects of an entire generation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

AAA urges international policymakers and relevant stakeholders to take urgent action to end targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure in the Amhara Region including attacks on educational facilities. AAA in particular presents the following key recommendations to select stakeholders, urging:

The African Union to:

1. **Direct the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)** to deploy a fact-finding mission to the Amhara Region to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity including attacks on schools, and other human rights violations, ensuring accountability for those responsible.
2. **Engage the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC)** to advocate for an immediate end to hostilities that threaten educational institutions and push for accountability mechanisms to protect civilians, particularly children and educators.
3. **Mobilize regional diplomatic efforts** to pressure the OPP regime to protect schools from military use and drone attacks, in line with international humanitarian law.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to:

4. **Establish an independent Commission of Inquiry** to investigate human rights violations in the Amhara Region, including the deliberate targeting of schools, students, and teachers since the declaration of the State of Emergency.
5. **Appoint a Special Rapporteur on Ethiopia** to monitor and report on violations of the right to education, school destruction, and state-sponsored repression. The Rapporteur should provide regular updates to the Council and the UN General Assembly.
6. **Advocate for legal accountability** by referring cases of attacks on educational institutions to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or another relevant tribunal, ensuring that perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity face justice.

The United States, Canada, European Union, and Other Countries to:

7. **Impose targeted sanctions** on OPP regime officials and military leaders responsible for the destruction of schools and the killing of students and teachers. Sanctions should include asset freezes, travel bans, and restrictions on military aid.

8. Increase emergency humanitarian assistance to rebuild damaged schools, provide alternative education for displaced students, and support teachers affected by the violence. Special attention should be given to psychosocial support for children who have experienced trauma.

9. Support independent investigations into the attacks on schools in the Amhara Region through the UNHRC or an independent commission of inquiry. Findings should be used to inform accountability measures.

Global Human Rights Organizations to:

10. Expand documentation and reporting efforts on atrocity crimes in Amhara Region and across Ethiopia including attacks against schools, forced recruitment of children, and other violations affecting education in Amhara.

11. Advocate for the protection of education in conflict by pressuring the OPP regime to sign and implement the Safe Schools Declaration, ensuring schools are protected from military use and drone attacks.



About the Amhara Association of North America (AAA)

The Amhara Association of North America (AAA) is a non-profit civic organization based in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA with members in other states and in Canada. AAA documents conflict, violence and political repression against Amhara communities across Ethiopia. AAA regularly engages government officials, international institutions, journalists, researchers and the wider public to raise awareness of human rights trends and promote justice and accountability. AAA also works with partners to organize members and allies of the (Amhara)-Ethiopian diaspora in the USA and beyond. AAA is a proud founding member of the Federation of Amharas in North America (FANA) and the International Amhara Movement (IAM) connecting communities and grassroots organizations across North America, Europe, Australasia, and beyond. AAA is not affiliated with any political organization in the USA, Ethiopia or elsewhere.

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