



“NO ONE CAME TO MY RESCUE”

GANG RAPE, SEXUAL SLAVERY, AND MASS DISPLACEMENT OF WOMEN IN OROMIA, ETHIOPIA

RESEARCH
BRIEFING

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GLOSSARY

| | |
|--------|--|
| ACHPR | African Commission on Human and People's Rights |
| CRSV | Conflict-Related Sexual Violence |
| ENDF | Ethiopian National Defense Forces, Government forces |
| EPRDF | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Persons |
| IHL | International Humanitarian Law |
| IHRL | International Human Rights Law |
| OLA | Oromo Liberation Army, An armed group formerly part of the OLF |
| OLF | Oromo Liberation Front, An armed group |
| OPDO | Oromo People's Democratic Organisation |
| SAF | Sudanese Armed Forces |
| SRH | Sexual and Reproductive Health |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNHCR | UN High Commissioner for Refugees |
| WBO | <i>Waraana Bilisumma Oromoo</i> (Afan Oromo term for the OLF) |
| WOREDA | Ethiopian District |

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Women cannot live in rural areas [of Kellem Wallaga Zone] anymore.”

An expert who travels to the Kellem Wallaga zone frequently.¹



 Map of the Sayo and Anfilo woredas in the Kellem Wallaga Zone of the Oromia region of Ethiopia.

As the armed conflict continues to rage in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, women and girls have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence since the beginning of the conflict in 2019. For this briefing, Amnesty International interviewed 10 survivors of gang rape, seven of whom were under the age of 18 at the time of the assaults. Three of the survivors were 17 years old at the time of the interview [see the methodology section on the organisation's safeguarding measures]. Survivors described harrowing details of enduring brutal violations that lasted days and sometimes weeks. Their accounts are a testament to their courage and strength as survivors, as well as to their pursuit of justice. Amnesty

¹ Interview by voice call with an expert who has access to Western Oromia frequently for humanitarian duties, 14 July 2025

International is grateful for their time and the evidence they have provided, which has allowed us to uncover clear patterns of human rights abuses in the region.

Since 2019, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), the former military wing of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), has been fighting the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and its allied Oromia regional security forces.

In this research, Amnesty International classifies the conflict in the Oromia region as a non-international armed conflict. This classification is made based on substantial evidence that the intensity of the fighting and the organisation of the non-state armed group involved in the violence meet international legal thresholds to qualify as an armed conflict [see the background section]. The conflict is being fought between the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and the Ethiopian national army alongside the Oromia Special Police Force, Oromia police, and local government militias.

The conflict has taken a heavy toll on the civilian population in the Oromia region.² It was marked by a year-long communications blackout in 2019 and multiple other restrictions on communications in subsequent years.³ In addition to the surge in violence against civilians, there have been restrictions on access to the impacted areas for international and African rights monitors, and a rise in crackdowns against human rights defenders and journalists by the Ethiopian government. As a result, the impact of this conflict on civilians has not been well documented.

The names and other identifying information of all interviewees have been changed at their request, citing a fear of reprisal.

In this research, Amnesty International investigated violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in the Sayo and Anfillo districts (woredas) of the Kellem Wallaga zone amid the ongoing conflict. These are among the areas where the conflict began and are strongholds of the OLA.

Amnesty International investigated 10 cases of sexual violence, five of which involved survivors who were subjected to both sexual slavery and gang rape. Nine survived sexual violence by OLA fighters, while one endured sexual violence by both an Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) soldier and OLA fighters. Two of the survivors became pregnant as a result of the sexual violence they were subjected to by OLA fighters. One of whom was pregnant at the time of the interview. Five of the survivors said they were targeted because their male relatives are members of the government militia.

Nine of the survivors are displaced from their homes after they were subjected to sexual violence, fearing that OLA fighters would return and rape them again or kill them, a frequent occurrence in the region that some survivors also endured. Survivors reported that they faced harassment and human rights abuses by the fighters when they stayed in their homes after surviving sexual violence. One survivor stayed home, while her entire family fled to a nearby town.

As part of this investigation, Amnesty International concluded that all 10 survivors have endured, some for more than five years, sexual and reproductive health issues as a direct result of the violence. The organisation also documented that all 10 survivors have lost their livelihoods and been pushed into poverty as a direct result of the violence by the OLA fighters, as they were forced to flee their homes. Despite longstanding health issues, survivors are reluctant to access medical care where it is available, due to fear of reprisals from OLA fighters and the social stigma associated with seeking sexual and reproductive health services.

Amnesty International has concluded that the armed conflict between OLA and the Ethiopian Government qualifies as a non-international armed conflict and is governed by Common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, and customary international humanitarian law (IHL)

The deliberate killing of civilians and fighters who are no longer taking part in hostilities is forbidden under IHL, and it constitutes the war crime of murder. Committing sexual violence in the context of an armed conflict, and when the perpetrator is aware of the circumstances, would make the act a war crime.

Given that nine survivors were displaced as a result of the sexual violence committed by armed groups, it is reasonable to believe that OLA fighters have used sexual violence to expel a section of the civilian population. OLA fighters also burned homes to expel survivors and their families, which exacerbates the pattern of ordering civilians to leave an area. Survivors stated that fighters would execute those who refused to leave. This act constitutes expulsion of a civilian population, which is forbidden under customary international humanitarian law.⁴

The armed conflict in the Oromia region has caused immense suffering for the civilian population over the past seven years. Abuses targeting civilians have led to complex and, at times, irreversible damage to the lives, property, and

² OCHA, “Ethiopia: Access Snapshot - East and West Wellega (Oromia), Kamashi (Benishangul Gumuz) (As of 28 February 2020)”, 6 March 2020, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-access-snapshot-east-and-west-wellega-oromia-kamashi-benishangul-gumuz-28>

³ Ezega News, “Ethiopian government lifts telecom ban on west Oromia amid international outcry”, 1 April 2020, <https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7870/Ethiopian-Government-Lifts-Telecom-Ban-on-West-Oromia-Amid-International-Outcry>; OCHA,

⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Customary International Humanitarian Law (IHL), Rule 129.

social cohesion of civilians. Survivors are demanding an end to violations of their rights by all armed actors and continue their quest for justice and guarantees of non-repetition.

Hence, Amnesty International calls on:

The Oromo Liberation Army to

- Immediately issue an order to all OLA fighters to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law.
- Publicly acknowledge the abuses endured by survivors as a result of the actions of OLA fighters.
- Immediately disarm and demobilize fighters and/or units who committed sexual violence, other forms of torture, killing, forced displacement, and other crimes under international law.
- Immediately end the torture and other ill treatment of civilians, particularly women and girls, including sexual violence, sexual slavery, executions, and forced displacement.
- Immediately stop the intimidation and harassment of health care service providers and survivors who seek medical care and support for sexual violence.
- Raise awareness and train OLA fighters on IHL to end attacks against civilian populations and to protect civilians, their properties, and civilian infrastructure.
- Ensure that survivors who have been expelled and displaced from their homes are able to safely return to their homes and resume their daily lives.
- Collaborate on and support a thorough, effective, independent, and impartial investigation by legitimate authorities into the violations of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in the context of the armed conflict in the Oromia region.

The Federal Government of Ethiopia to

- Conduct a comprehensive, independent, and credible investigation on rape and sexual violence in the context of the conflict in Oromia by OLA fighters, with a view to ensuring justice and accountability to the survivors.
- Investigate the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) committed by ENDF soldiers, as documented in this report, as well as crimes under international law documented in Amnesty International's previous research, relating to both the 2020 armed conflict in Tigray and the ongoing conflict in the Amhara region.
- End the increasing harassment of members of the national human rights and civil society community, as well as journalists, and ensure they have access to the Oromia region to further investigate the alleged violations of international law.
- Respond favorably, without further delay, to the visit request from the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
- Invite and facilitate access to the Oromia region for other relevant thematic UN Special Procedure mandates and United Nations (UN) agencies, international human rights and humanitarian law organisations, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) to investigate the abuses.

2. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This investigation into violations of international law, mainly international human rights law and international humanitarian law, focuses on the non-international armed conflict that broke out in 2019 between the OLA and ENDF and its allied regional state security forces. This research focuses on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence perpetrated in the Kellem Wallaga zone of the Oromia region, with a particular focus on the Sayo and Anfilo woredas.

CRSV is a term used to refer to “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict” as defined by the report of the UN Secretary-General.⁵

The Secretary-General’s report further clarifies that the link between CRSV to the conflict “may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, ... the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a persecuted political, ethnic or religious minority, or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; the climate of impunity, which is generally associated with State collapse; cross-border consequences, such as displacement or trafficking; and/or violations of the provisions of a ceasefire agreement. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual violence and/or exploitation, when committed in situations of conflict.”⁶

Ten survivors of CRSV who were interviewed for this research were identified through interlocutors who had already established a relationship with them. With survivors at risk of reprisal from perpetrators for speaking out, Amnesty International’s consultant on the ground, who was responsible for organising logistics for the interview, organised a safe location for the interview in close coordination with the researcher. Our researchers gathered testimonies from survivors through direct interviews via encrypted communication apps and in the presence of trusted interlocutors.

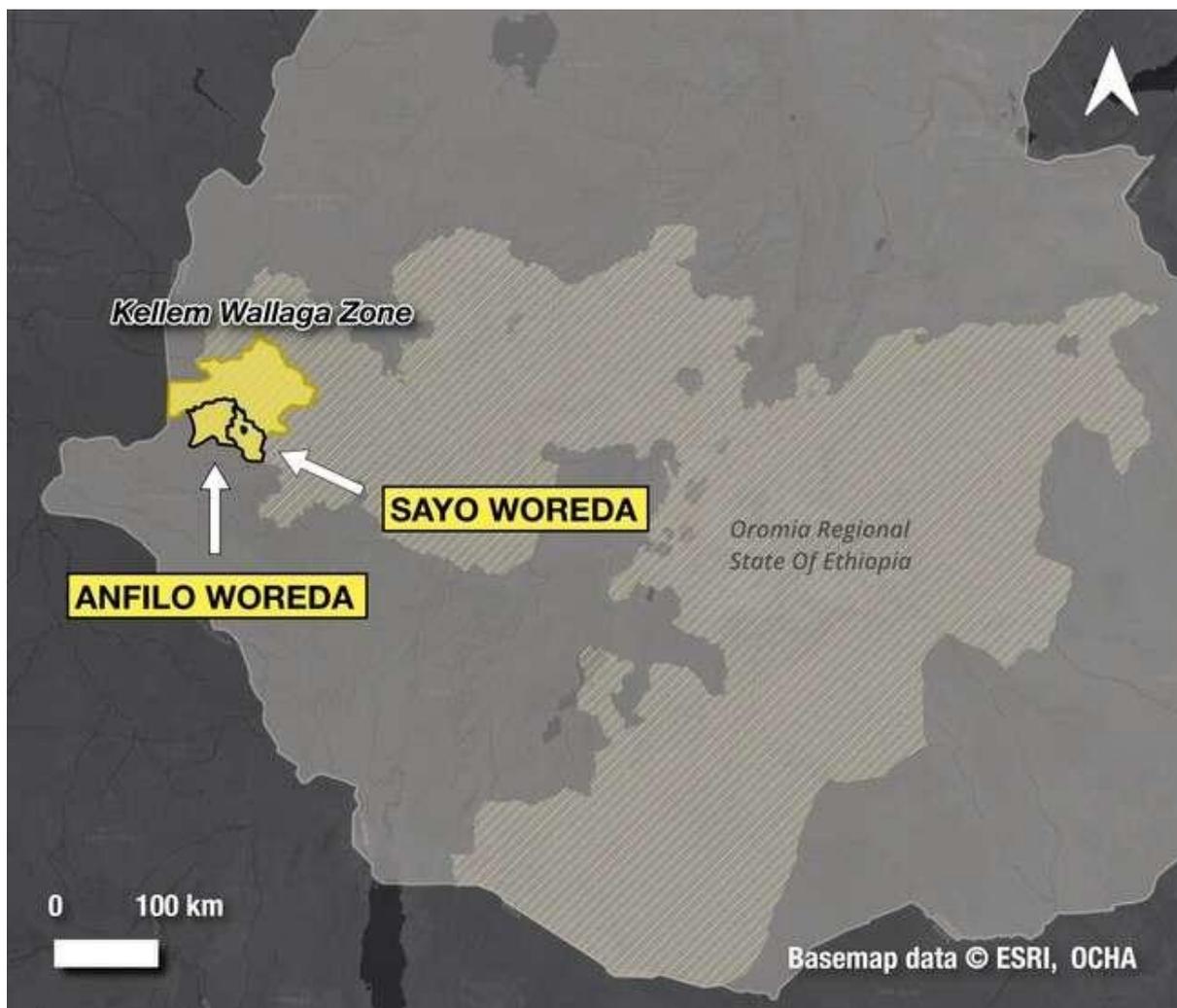
All names and key information that could lead to the identification of the survivors have been withheld or altered in this briefing to protect their safety, as they are at risk of reprisals. The organisation did the same with the names of all nine experts interviewed, per their request.

Amnesty International, in collaboration with its partners, provided sexual and reproductive health care support to all survivors, which was accessed by five of the survivors. The survivors expressed fear about travelling to the location where the healthcare service is provided, stating that perpetrators might be informed, which could lead to their targeting. The organisation facilitating the service implemented additional protections for the survivors. As a result, five survivors obtained medical treatments.

The organisation obtained medical files directly from survivors, which were used as part of the evidence base for this research. After obtaining consent, Amnesty International accessed additional medical files and medical testimonies directly related to the incidents documented in this report directly from health care providers. The organisation limited its access to the minimum necessary medical evidence to inform its analysis and did not access further details of the survivors’ medical history. The organisation also interviewed nine other individuals with different expertise and gathered additional evidence on broader violations of international law in the Oromia region, in particular CRSV in the Kellem Wallaga zone.

⁵ 2019-SG-Report.pdf, [⁶ 2019-SG-Report.pdf](https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/report/conflict-related-sexual-violence-report-of-the-<u>united-nations-secretary-general/2019-SG-Report.pdf</u></p></div><div data-bbox=)

3. BACKGROUND



↑ Map of the Sayo and Anfillo woredas in the Kellam Wallaga Zone of the Oromia region.

The Oromia regional state is Ethiopia's largest region, both in terms of area and population. The region, located in Ethiopia's western and central zones, is home to more than 40 million people, covers 34% of Ethiopia's land, and accounts for half of the country's crop production.⁷ It also accounts for 45% of the land cultivated for cereal production

⁷ Ethiopian Economics Association, Proceedings of the Second Regional Conference on the Oromia Regional State Economic Development, August 2024, <https://eea-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Proceedings-of-the-Oromia-regional-state-final-with-cover.pdf>

and contributes 44% of Ethiopia's total livestock population.⁸ Oromia produces most of Ethiopia's coffee (59% in 2024/25) and is the second-largest gold exporter, after the Tigray region.⁹

Since 2014, people in the region have faced gross human rights violations in the wake of a four-year protest led by young people demanding justice and equity. The then-ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) responded to these protests with brute force, including executions and other human rights abuses.¹⁰ In 2018, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned, and Abiy Ahmed was appointed as his successor. Ahmed was a member of the then Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), part of the EPRDF's Oromia-based coalition.

A prolonged armed conflict has blighted the region since 2019, affecting the majority of its zones. ENDF, and Oromia regional state police and security forces have been fighting the OLF for nearly seven years at the time of publication.¹¹

3.1 FROM OLF TO OLA

The OLA is the former military wing of the OLF, a political party currently registered in Ethiopia, chaired by Daud Ibsa. It is known to the broader Afan Oromo-speaking population by the name *Waraana Bilisumma Oromoo (WBO)*, and referred to as *OLF-Shene* or simply *Shene* by Ethiopian government officials.

The OLF has its roots in armed resistance against the then-military regime, the Derg, dating back to 1973.

After the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991, the OLF was briefly part of the transitional government before it left following a fallout with the EPRDF.¹² The fallout led to the mass and arbitrary detention of tens of thousands living across the Oromia region, as documented by Amnesty International and other human rights organisations at the time.¹³

Since its withdrawal from power in 1992, the OLF has repeatedly clashed with the Ethiopian government. It was listed as a terrorist group, alongside Al Shabab, in 2011, then de-listed following a truce in 2018. However, one year later, hostilities resumed. OLA officially announced its breakaway from the OLF in 2019.¹⁴

The western command of the OLA is based in the Wallaga areas of Oromia, with a stronghold in the Kellem Wallaga Zone. In the years that followed the breakaway, the then Western Command military leader, Kumsa Diriba, also known as Jal Maro, rose to become OLA's commander-in-chief.

Since mid-2019, the Ethiopian government security forces, led by the ENDF, has launched an offensive in western Oromia, placing at least four zones of Oromia under a full communications blackout for almost one year.¹⁵ In May 2021, Ethiopia's lawmakers designated the OLA as a terrorist organisation.¹⁶

The Kellem Wallaga zone, home to more than one million people, is among the major areas impacted by the renewed armed conflict since 2019.¹⁷ The zone is located near the South Sudan-Sudan border and is known for its dense forests, which make it one of the major strongholds of the then OLF, now OLA.

According to UN data published in 2024, more than 103,000 people were displaced directly as a result of the armed conflict and attacks targeting the civilian population in the Kellem Wallaga zone.¹⁸ Dembi Dollo, the zonal capital,

⁸ Ethiopian Economics Association, Proceedings of the Second Regional Conference (previously cited).

⁹ Birr Metrics, "Ethiopia's gold exports hit \$2.05bn amid policy shift and buoyant global prices", 26 May 2025, <https://birrmetrics.com/ethiopias-gold-exports-hit-2-05bn-amid-policy-shift-and-buoyant-global-prices/> s

¹⁰ Ethiopia: 'Because I am Oromo': Sweeping repression in the Oromia region of Ethiopia - Amnesty International

¹¹ All Africa, "Ethiopia defense force begins airstrike in Western Oromia – says targets are OLF military training camps", 13 January 2019, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201901150821.html>

¹² Africa Intelligence, "Ethiopia: OLF leaves transitional government", 27 June 1992, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-africa-and-the-horn/1992/06/27/olf-leaves-transitional-government.15618-art>

¹³ Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Accountability past and present: human rights in transition (Index: AFR 25/006/1995)", 18 April 1995, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/006/1995/en/>;

"Ethiopia: Prisoner of conscience / fear of ill-treatment: Zegeye Asfaw" (Index: AFR 25/005/1996), 10 June 1996, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/005/1996/en/>; Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: legal concern / fear of ill-treatment: Arega Kitata, Tilahun Hirpassa, Wolde-Yesus Mengesha, Haile Legesse and large numbers of others from the Oromo ethnic group" (Index: AFR 25/007/1992), 20 November 1992, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/007/1992/en/>

¹⁴ The Reporter, "OLF Politics, Military Splits", 6 April 2019, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/7750/>

¹⁵ Ezega News, "Ethiopian government lifts telecom ban on west Oromia amid international outcry", 1 April 2020, <https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7870/Ethiopian-Government-Lifts-Telecom-Ban-on-West-Oromia-Amid-International-Outcry>; OCHA, "Ethiopia: Access Snapshot - East and West Wellega (Oromia), Kamashi (Benishangul Gumuz) (As of 28 February 2020)", 6 March 2020, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-access-snapshot-east-and-west-wellega-oromia-kamashi-benishangul-gumuz-28>

¹⁶ Al Jazeera, "Ethiopia to designate TPLF, OLF-Shene as 'terror' groups", [ADD DATE], <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/1/ethiopia-to-designate-tplf-olf-shene-as-terror-groups>

¹⁷ Food Security Cluster, IA Multi-Sectoral Humanitarian Needs' Assessment Report in Kellem Wollega Zone (Dembi Dollo Town, Sayo, Hawa Gelan, Jimma Horo, and Gawo Kebe Woredas), 8-12 April 2024, <https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/IA%20Multi-Sectoral%20Humanitarian%20Needs%20Assessment%20Report%20in%20Kellem%20Wollega%20Zone.pdf> (Food Security Cluster, IA Multi-Sectoral Humanitarian Needs).

¹⁸ Food Security Cluster, IA Multi-Sectoral Humanitarian Needs (previously cited).

hosted 80% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from neighbouring areas. In this research, Amnesty International has investigated cases of sexual violence from the Sayo and Anfilo Districts of Kellem Wallaga Zone. These woredas account for 21,000 IDPs.¹⁹

3.1.1. OLA AS AN ORGANISED ARMED GROUP

In its 2023 official manifesto, the OLA states that it is fighting to free the Oromo people from political exclusion, economic exploitation, and socio-cultural marginalisation.²⁰ Kumsa Diriba, widely known as Jal Maro, is currently recognised as the OLA's Commander-in-Chief. He represented the group in two rounds of internationally mediated negotiations in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar with Ethiopian authorities.²¹

However, an expert interviewed by Amnesty International said that the chain of command between the commander-in-chief and his subordinates is not as strong as it's made out to be by the group.²² According to the political analyst:

“My observation is that the chief commander does not always have an absolute command. But it is also important to recognise how big the region [Oromia] is, leading to difficulty in even having central command meetings in person regularly.”²³

The OLA has five main commands: Western, Eastern, Northern, Central, and Harsadee.²⁴ At time of publication, the Western command is led by Jal Gemechu Aboye, who is also the Deputy Commander of the OLA.²⁵ The Central Regional Command, commonly known as the Shewa Command, is reported to be led by Jal Jiregna.²⁶

The OLA has been accused of targeting civilians in the Oromia region on multiple occasions, including allegations of killing, kidnapping, and torturing civilians, healthcare professionals, humanitarian workers, and human rights defenders.²⁷

3.1.1 THE DELIBERATE HIDING OF THE CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT

After a brief opening in 2018, Ethiopian authorities gradually narrowed civic space nationwide, especially following the 2020 armed conflict in the Tigray region.²⁸

However, the near closure of civic space in Oromia began when the conflict first broke out in 2019, isolating conflict-affected areas by rendering them inaccessible to independent monitors. The four Wallega zones of the Oromia region were under a year-long full communications blackout in 2019, followed by multiple communication restrictions in subsequent years.²⁹

After 2020, Ethiopian authorities also restricted access to the country for international investigators, including the UN-appointed International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE).

Authorities also denied journalists access to conflict-affected areas. In 2021, Amir Aman Kiyaro, a freelance videographer for the Associated Press, was arbitrarily detained for covering the conflict in the Oromia region.³⁰ In 2023, more than half a dozen journalists reporting from the Oromia region were detained, as documented by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).³¹ In February 2024, authorities arrested French journalist Antoine Galindo alongside the late Oromo opposition political figure Bate Urgessa.³² Galindo was released on bail one week later, while Urgessa was

¹⁹ Food Security Cluster, IA Multi-Sectoral Humanitarian Needs (previously cited).

²⁰ OLF manifesto, page 1, OLA-OLF High Command, January 2023

²¹ Voice of Africa, “Ethiopia rebels announce peace talks in Tanzania”, 13 November 2023, <https://www.voaffrica.com/a/ethiopia-rebels-announce-peace-talks-in-tanzania/7353501.html>

²² Interview with a regional peace and security expert, 24 July 2025; Interview with a political analyst,

²³ Interview with a regional peace and security expert, 24 July 2025.

²⁴ Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo, “Summary of major engagements: The second half of June 2025 – Oromo Liberation Front – Oromo Liberation Army OLF-OLA”, 4 July 2025, <https://qbo-abo-wbo.org/2025/07/04/summary-of-major-engagements-the-second-half-of-june-2025-oromo-liberation-front-oromo-liberation-army-olf-ola/>

²⁵ Political Economy Profiles, “Jal Gemachu Aboye, Vice Commander of OLA, manifesting the strategic goals of his organisation”, 17 May 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCRwFkxFUbo>

²⁶ Interview with a regional peace and security expert, 24 July 2025.

²⁷ Oromia regional prosecutor killed, three abducted in alleged armed group attack in East Wollega - Addis Standard

²⁸ OPED Ethiopia: Fragile new-found press freedom must be buttressed in law and practice - Amnesty International

²⁹ Ethiopia: Authorities must drop proposed changes to the CSO law, halt restrictions on civic space - Amnesty International

³⁰ Ezega News, “Ethiopian government lifts telecom ban on west Oromia amid international outcry”, 1 April 2020, <https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7870/Ethiopian-Government-Lifts-Telecom-Ban-on-West-Oromia-Amid-International-Outcry>

³¹ East African herald, “Mass Arrests and Beatings: How Ethiopia went from Celebrating Journalists to Jailing them”, 6 May 2025, <https://www.eastafricanherald.com/politics/2025/5/6/mass-arrests-and-beatings-how-ethiopia-went-from-celebrating-journalists-to-jailing-them>

³² The Reporter Ethiopia, “The Silent Conflict: What Is Really Happening In Oromia?” 10 May 2025, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/45060/>

³³ BBC, “Bate Urgessa: Ethiopian opposition OLF figure shot dead and dumped by road” 10 April 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68779990>

arbitrarily detained for two weeks. Two months later, Urgessa was assassinated under unknown circumstances, with allegations implying that the killing was carried out by government officials.³³

³³ Addis Standard, “Justice Denied: One year since the assassination of Bate Urgessa, still No accountability. Time to break the silence and end impunity!”, 11 April 2025, <https://addisstandard.com/justice-denied-one-year-since-the-assassination-of-bate-urgessa-still-no-accountability-time-to-break-the-silence-and-end-impunity/>

4. SEXUAL SLAVERY, RAPE AND GANG RAPE

“They used to rape us every day, twice a day. Around 11 am and 6 pm. I used to feel frightened around this time every day. They used to tell me, ‘You will die. You will never return home.’³⁴

Sabontu, aged 17

Lalistu, a single mother of four, once had her own home.³⁵ She had a farm, her children were in school, and her husband was alive. In 2020, all of this changed. Members of the OLA stormed into her home in the middle of the night, demanding she give them her 12-year-old daughter, Sabontu, to braid their hair.³⁶ Thus began an ordeal that scarred both mother and daughter for years to come.

When the OLA fighters came to take their daughter, Lalistu and her late husband refused. However, the fighters killed her husband and abducted 12-year-old Sabontu to the nearby forest where they were based. Her mother, Lalistu, went with her child, and over the following three weeks, multiple men from the OLA subjected mother and daughter to rape.³⁷

“After they forced us to eat food [on the first day], they first raped my child. Then they stabbed me when I screamed, ‘Why are you violating my child?’ After they stabbed me, they also started to rape me. For three weeks, 15 men were raping my child and me. They used to take turns,” said Lalistu.³⁸

Both Lalistu and Sabontu told Amnesty International that they were held in a cave and had their hands tied to a tree at all times.

Sabontu – now 17 years old – said she thought that she would end up a hostage forever.³⁹ Her mother also said she believed they would not make it out alive, as she heard the fighters saying, “If they return to their home, they will

³⁴ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number two.

³⁵ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number one.

³⁶ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number one.

³⁷ Interview by voice call with two survivors, July 2025, Number one and two (previously cited).

³⁸ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number one, (previously cited).

³⁹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number two, (previously cited).

tarnish our names.” She said the fighters threatened to kill them every day. However, a sudden armed confrontation that broke out three weeks after their abduction led to their abandonment when the fighters fled.⁴⁰

Lalistu and Sabontu are among the 10 cases of sexual violence Amnesty International has investigated for this research. Of those 10 cases, five involved cases of sexual slavery.⁴¹ Survivors endured gang rape, rape, beatings, and other forms of torture while their captors held them hostage. Three of the five, including Sabontu, were under the age of 18 at the time of the assaults.⁴²

Lalistu, like many other survivors of CRSV from the Sayo and Anfilo woredas, fled her home together with Sabontu and her other children after the ordeal and never returned, fearing for their lives.⁴³

“My children and I share one carpet to sleep on. Someone provided the current shelter we live in,” said Lalistu, who is the breadwinner of her household.⁴⁴

Another woman, Hela, spoke of a similar ordeal that she faced at the hands of OLA fighters in 2022.⁴⁵ She recounted how multiple fighters subjected her to sexual violence over the course of one week. Hela also said she was frequently beaten by the fighters who left scars on her body.⁴⁶

She, like Sabontu and Lalistu, said that the fighters were not planning to release her; rather, they talked about killing her.⁴⁷ She said she was told by the fighters, “We don’t know what you will do after you return home, so we will kill you.” However, she was released after a fighter who knew her came to where she was being held and intervened. Hela told us that he was someone from her village, and he forbade them from killing her after recognizing her.⁴⁸

Another survivor, Anisa, was held in sexual slavery by OLA fighters at the end of 2024.⁴⁹ She said that in the first incident, fighters took her from her home to the bush, where they gang raped her, then brought her back the next day. They then returned, repeatedly, to take her back to the bush, gang rape her, and send her home.⁵⁰

Anisa was pregnant at the time of the interview with Amnesty International. She said the fighters stopped coming to her home as her pregnancy became increasingly visible. As a result of the frequent rape, Anisa said she developed a medical condition, which she thinks also stopped the fighters from returning.⁵¹

Simbone, too, was among those who were held in sexual slavery in 2021.⁵² She said the OLA fighters held her for two days and gang raped her before abandoning her on the street. They also beat her and stabbed her, leaving visible scars on her body.⁵³ Two months after the first abduction, the OLA fighters returned. Again, they held her for two days and gang raped her, then abandoned her on the street. She only found her way home with the help of strangers.⁵⁴ Simbone then left her village for a nearby town, where she is raising her child, whom she conceived as a result of the second round of sexual violence.

“The second time was the worst,” said Simbone. “Since then, I have been sick. There is a fluid coming out of my body to this day. I have no energy. I cannot function to do anything. I am still not well.”⁵⁵

Simbone said she never wants to return to her village. Not only is she terrified that the fighters will come looking for her, but she also faces stigma from the community for enduring the sexual violence.

⁴⁰ Interview by voice call with survivors, July 2025, Number one and two, (previously cited).

⁴¹ Interview by voice call with five survivors, July 2025, Number one, two, three, seven and nine. Three medical documents reviewed by Amnesty International are documented in the file.

⁴² Interview by voice call with five survivors, July 2025, Numbers two, seven and nine. Two medical documents reviewed in the file.

⁴³ Interview by voice call with two survivors, July 2025, Number one and two.

⁴⁴ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number one.

⁴⁵ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven, a medical document reviewed, in file.

⁴⁶ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven, (previously cited)

⁴⁷ Interview by voice call with three survivors, July 2025, Number one, two and seven.

⁴⁸ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven.

⁴⁹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number three, a medical document review, in file.

⁵⁰ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number three, (previously cited).

⁵¹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven.

⁵² Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number nine, a medical document reviewed, in file.

⁵³ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven.

⁵⁴ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven, (previously cited).

⁵⁵ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven, (previously cited).

Through this research, Amnesty International documented similar patterns of human rights violations committed by OLA members between 2020 and the end of 2024, including rape and gang rape in the Sayo and Anfilo woredas of the Kellem Wallaga zone.

4.1 SURVIVING RAPE AND GANG RAPE

All ten women and girls interviewed by Amnesty International for this investigation survived rape or gang rape.⁵⁶ All of the survivors identified the perpetrators as members of the *WBO*, the Afaan Oromo name for the OLA.⁵⁷ One survivor endured violence from both an ENDF soldier and OLA fighters.⁵⁸

The survivor subjected to rape by an ENDF soldier stated that she was able to identify him because he was stationed in the area and is known by name in the village.⁵⁹ Survivors mentioned that they identified the perpetrators as OLA fighters by their recognisable long, braided hairstyles. The survivors also said that the fighters told them who they were outright.⁶⁰

During this investigation, survivors shared the names of 13 perpetrators with Amnesty International: 12 OLA fighters and one ENDF soldier.⁶¹ We could not verify their identities at the time of publication, but recorded the information for future investigation.

Seven survivors were under the age of 18 at the time of the sexual violence, while three were 17 during interviews in 2025.⁶² Two survivors have given birth as a result of the sexual violence, while one survivor was pregnant at the time of the interview in June 2025.⁶³

Debiko was gang raped by OLA fighters in 2022.⁶⁴ She said she left her house to look for her children immediately after an intense armed clash between government forces and OLA fighters in her village. Her children were playing outside, and she was worried that they would be harmed in the fighting.⁶⁵

Debiko's home was in an area under OLA control. She had just brought her youngest back inside when she encountered OLA fighters. They accused her of working for the government forces:

“Three fighters came to me and said, ‘You are returning after hiding weapons for government fighters.’ First, they hit my child while he was on my back using the rifle butt. Then they raped me in front of my two children, who were under 15 years old. They [the fighters] were 13 people, they took turns on me.”⁶⁶

⁵⁶ Interview by voice call with survivors, July 2025, Number one to 10.

⁵⁷ Interview by voice call with survivors, July 2025, Number one to 10.

⁵⁸ Interview by voice call with survivors, July 2025, Number one to 10, except five; interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number five.

⁵⁹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number five.

⁶⁰ Interview by voice call with survivors, July 2025, Number one to 10.

⁶¹ Interview by voice call with six survivors, July 2025.

⁶² Interview by voice call with survivors, July 2025, Number two, five to 10.

⁶³ Interview by voice call with three survivors, July 2025, Number seven, nine and three.

⁶⁴ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number four.

⁶⁵ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number four, (previously cited) (Cited above).

⁶⁶ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number four, (previously cited)

5. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A REPRISAL AND THE FORCED AND MASS DISPLACEMENT OF WOMEN

“Before the incident, we used to lead a good life. Our family is now dismantled. We are not living together anymore. My father used to be a farmer. He used to have a farm and a coffee field. He used to have cattle and other animals. My mom used to be a trader. We were eight children, so we were a family of 10 people. We had a big house made of 80 metal sheets. Now we are displaced, our home is burnt, and we have lost everything. Our home was burnt in December 2022.⁶⁷

Yanet, survivor of CRSV

Amnesty International established a consistent pattern of abuse whereby OLA fighters targeted female family members as an act of reprisal against those who joined government forces. Five survivors said OLA fighters explicitly told them that they were targeted because their male family members were fighting against them.⁶⁸

Hela is one such survivor. She was subjected to sexual violence because OLA fighters had heard that her uncle was conscripted to join the local government militia, a force that fights the OLA alongside other government forces, including the ENDF.⁶⁹

Another survivor, Ogeti, said she was gang raped by five OLA fighters in 2023, including by the area commander. She said her father was forced to join the government armed forces, and the OLA fighters told her that they gang raped her due to his conscription.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number ten.

⁶⁸ Interview by voice call with five survivors, July 2025, Number two, three, four, eight and ten.

⁶⁹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number four.

⁷⁰ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number eight.

“They [the OLA fighters] said, ‘Your father is Militia, and we will kill you.’ We were attacked because of him.”⁷¹

All five survivors added that their male family members had been forcibly recruited by local officials to join security forces, primarily the government militia.⁷²

One survivor, Dureti, said that OLA fighters subjected her to rape in reprisal for a different reason: because they knew she had been raped by an ENDF soldier.⁷³ She told Amnesty International that the OLA fighters came to her home two months after the ENDF soldier had raped her.

Dureti recalled that she had been walking in her neighbourhood when a woman who owned a small shop called to her. Dureti walked in only to fall into the hands of an ENDF soldier who dragged her into another room behind the shop. Dureti believes that the shop-owner was paid by the soldier to lure her in.

“I was screaming for help,” said Dureti. “He [the ENDF soldier] raped me while I was screaming for help. He raped me while the entire neighbourhood was listening to me scream. No one came to my rescue.”⁷⁴

Dureti never told anyone what happened. Yet she suspects that neighbours told the OLA fighters, having heard her screams. Two months later, Dureti’s family witnessed OLA fighters abduct her from her home. She said her mother refused to let her go, and the fighters beat her mother as a result. Dureti said six fighters raped her from midnight till dawn, then told her to go home in the morning.

5.1 SURVIVING FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Among the 10 survivors interviewed for this research, only one, Anisa, still lives in her hometown. However, Anisa said her whole family has left.

“My family was scared, and they could not rescue me. Now they all left for another area, because they were scared for their lives. But I stayed here, because what else could happen to me in addition to what already happened?”⁷⁵

Another woman, Hela, and her family also left their village after OLA fighters burnt their home and raped her.⁷⁶ Hela said:

“I left the area [her home village] three months after the attack because there were instances where the fighters killed women, they attacked [raped], and there were others whom they took again. So, we left as we feared that it would happen to me, too. But when I left, it was too late. I was already three months pregnant.”⁷⁷

Ogeti, another survivor, and her family lived in their home for one year after she faced sexual violence, refusing to flee the area.⁷⁸ But one year later, she said the fighters burned their home and told them to leave. Due to a transportation disruption, she and her family walked more than 30km to the nearby city where they now live.⁷⁹

5.2. THE DISTURBING PATTERN OF DISPLACEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE KELLEM WALLAGA ZONE

⁷¹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number eight, (previously cited)

⁷² Interview by voice call with five survivors, July 2025, Number two, three, four, eight and ten.

⁷³ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number five.

⁷⁴ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number five. (previously cited)

⁷⁵ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number three.

⁷⁶ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven.

⁷⁷ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number seven, (previously cited).

⁷⁸ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number eight.

⁷⁹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number eight.

Multiple humanitarian and human rights agencies, including the UN, have documented a pattern of forced displacement of women and girls in the Kellem Wallaga zone.⁸⁰

According to a report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), hundreds of thousands of civilians were displaced across the Oromia region, and this number reached more than one million in 2023.⁸¹ The UN agency stated that conflict was the primary cause of displacement for over 66% of IDPs that it surveyed in camps.⁸²

A 2023 report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) identified conflict as the major driver of 224,000 internally displaced people across all four Wallaga zones: East, West, Kellem, and Horo Guduru.⁸³ A year later, the same report revealed that the number of IDPs in Oromia decreased by 15% due to the return of IDPs to their homes. However, in the four Oromia zones, 200,000 people still remained in IDP camps, with conflict being the leading cause of their displacement.

According to the UNHCR, the four Wallaga zones have the leading number of conflict-related displacements in the Oromia region, as they have been severely affected by armed conflict between the OLA and the government since 2019.⁸⁴ The zone also borders Benishangul Gumuz and parts of Gojam in the Amhara region, where violence-related displacements are frequent.

According to UNHCR's 2023 assessment in IDP camps in the East, West, and Kellem Wallaga zones, gender-based violence in the context of armed conflict was highlighted as a main factor for displacement.⁸⁵

The report also emphasizes that the conflict in the area has led to family breakdowns and weakened traditional social support systems; therefore, internally displaced girls and women are the sole providers in child- and women-headed households.⁸⁶

A 2024 report, compiled by four UN agencies and NGOs, documented conflict-related displacement in both Sayo and Anfilo woredas.⁸⁷ The report confirms that the majority of the displaced population in the Kellem Wallaga zone, where Sayo and Anfilo woredas are located, are women and children. It stated that there were 52,686 women IDPs in the Kellem Wallaga zone, and over 18,150 children at risk of female genital mutilation, rape, child labour, child marriage, family separation, and negative coping mechanisms.⁸⁸

The report also confirms that "IDPs are unable to return to their place of origin for fear of attack from either side; as a result, they left all of their belongings and agricultural lands unattended for years, exacerbating their plight."

Nine experts interviewed by Amnesty International corroborate these findings and believe that conflict in the rural areas is causing the displacement of women and children. One expert who travelled to the Kellem Wallaga zone for professional reasons stated that "villages [in Kellem Wallaga] have become unliveable for women."⁸⁹

“Women cannot live in the rural areas [of the Kellem Wallaga Zone] anymore. There is a high rate of migration of women to the nearest town, where most are forced to do daily labor for survival, such as housework. One of the major factors for this is the forced conscription of men by the government to join

⁸⁰ UNHCR Ethiopia Protection and Solutions Monitoring Report 11_Nekemte 2023.pdf; DTM, Ethiopia National Displacement Report 16, November 2022-June 2023, https://www.developmentaid.org/api/frontend/cms/file/2023/08/DTM-Ethiopia_National-Displacement-Report-16-Nov-22-Jun-23.pdf (Ethiopia National Displacement Report 16); Food Security Cluster, IA Multi-Sectoral Humanitarian Needs (previously cited).

⁸¹ Ethiopia National Displacement Report 16 (previously cited).

⁸² Ethiopia National Displacement Report 16 (previously cited).

⁸³ Ethiopia National Displacement Report 16 (previously cited).

⁸⁴ IA Multi-Sectoral Humanitarian Needs Assessment Report in Kellem Wollega Zone.pdf

⁸⁵ UNHCR Ethiopia Protection and Solutions Monitoring Report 11_Nekemte 2023.pdf; DTM, Ethiopia National Displacement Report 16, November 2022-June 2023.

⁸⁶ UNHCR Ethiopia Protection and Solutions Monitoring Report 11_Nekemte 2023.pdf; DTM, Ethiopia National Displacement Report 16, November 2022-June 2023.

⁸⁷ Food Security Cluster, IA Multi-Sectoral Humanitarian Needs Assessment Report in Kellem Wollega Zone.pdf, Issued by UNHCR, listed participant agencies and NGOs, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, World Vision, SCI, AAH, DAE, Imagine 1Day, EECMY-DASSC, ANE, FIDO, and ASDEPO.

⁸⁸ Food Security Cluster, IA Multi-Sectoral Humanitarian Needs Assessment Report in Kellem Wollega Zone.pdf, Issued by UNHCR, listed participant agencies and NGOs, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, World Vision, SCI, AAH, DAE, Imagine 1Day, EECMY-DASSC, ANE, FIDO, and ASDEPO (cited above).

⁸⁹ Interview by voice call with an expert who has access to Western Oromia frequently for humanitarian duties, 14 July 2025

the local militia that is fighting the OLA. It is very rare to find someone who joins the government militia voluntarily, as they know that OLA fighters will commit revenge attacks against their families. If OLA fighters hear that someone joined the militia, they will attack the remaining family members, mainly women.”⁹⁰

An expert who travels to the Kellem Wallaga zone for professional missions interviewed by Amnesty International.

⁹⁰ Interview by voice call with an expert who has access to Western Oromia frequently for humanitarian duties, 14 July 2025, (cited above)

6. SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

"I still cannot carry heavy things, I feel pain, and some days I cannot breathe."⁹¹

Sabontu, survivor of CRSV

All 10 survivors of CRSV and one child of a survivor who suffered severe beatings are still grappling with physical trauma that has led to various health complications. Amnesty International obtained medical files of seven survivors that document the physical health consequences survivors endured as a result of the sexual violence they faced. A summary of one medical report shows that the child of one of the survivors was beaten by a rifle butt by OLA fighters. The child has endured severe physical trauma, required multiple surgeries, and remains in critical condition. An expert confirmed that two survivors are living with a fistula.⁹² As a result of the sexual violence.

Sabontu, who was gang raped when she was 12 years old, said that she still feels immense pain. She said she preferred to get traditional medication post the abuse.

"I still cannot carry heavy things, I feel pain, and some days I cannot breathe," she said.⁹³

One survivor who was pregnant at the time of the interview said she feared that she may have contracted a sexually transmitted infection, which was causing painful complications, as a result of the rape.⁹⁴

Three expert interviewees stated that there are health care centres that offer post-rape care and other sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to patients in their woredas, Sayo and Anfilo Woredas of Kellem Wallaga Zone.

According to a medical expert interviewed by Amnesty International, there are one-stop centres near the Sayo and Anfilo woredas, with the capacity to deliver post-rape care, though they are not properly resourced in terms of a sufficient number of trained staff and medical equipment.

However, many survivors, like Sabontu, hesitate to visit the centres, fearing that the medical staff might inform the OLA fighters. This pattern was also observed by Amnesty International, as some survivors declined medical treatment provided after a referral to a health centre in the country by Amnesty International. Others obtained the service after further measures to reassure their safety were put in place.

Survivors also expressed fear of accessing the services due to societal stigma. They fear that if they are seen seeking sexual and reproductive health services, including post-rape care, they will be stigmatized due to the perception that they received abortion care.

⁹¹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number two.

⁹² Traumatic fistula is a medical condition caused by rape, often aggravated by the thrusting of objects into the vagina, which can result in a hole between a woman's vagina and bladder or rectum, or both, resulting in the leaking of urine and/or feces. Survivors live not only with chronic incontinence, but also with the psychological trauma and stigma of rape.

⁹³ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number two.

⁹⁴ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number three.

A medical worker who works directly with survivors of sexual violence in the area interviewed by Amnesty International said that the OLA fighters are against abortion care and that they would target them for providing such care. The expert noted that there were instances where they had to use underground support networks for survivors of rape to access abortions.

A public health expert interviewed by Amnesty International stated that there is a general fear of the alleged consequences of abortion among survivors in the area due to a lack of awareness that it is a safe medical procedure and the spread of misinformation.

Additionally, an aid worker in the area interviewed by Amnesty International said that the population generally rejects abortion as it is considered a sin according to their religious teachings.

7. SUMMARY KILLINGS

OLA fighters also killed male family members of the women they subjected to sexual violence, as witnessed by three of the survivors interviewed for this research. Among them is Lelistu, who said her husband was killed as he refused to allow the fighters to take his 12-year-old daughter and wife, and followed them while they were being taken to the bush.⁹⁵

“While we were walking, they [the fighters] were warning him [her husband] to return,” said Lelistu. “But he said, ‘I will not leave my child behind and go back.’ Then they shot and killed him when we reached the forest. I didn’t even look back at him after they killed him.”⁹⁶

Another woman, Debiko, said her husband was forcibly conscripted by the government and joined the local government militia before she was attacked by the OLA fighters. She said they used to be merchants and had a good life. On the day of the attack, a male relative, whom she was sheltering, was shot and killed by the fighters. She told Amnesty International that he jumped on one of the fighters in her defence, unable to watch while she was raped. The OLA fighters shot and killed him, Debiko told Amnesty International.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number one.

⁹⁶ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number one. (Cited above)

⁹⁷ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number four.

8. LEGAL ANALYSIS

The ongoing armed conflict in the Oromia region of Ethiopia since 2019 is a non-international armed conflict. The armed conflict between the OLA, the ENDF and allied Oromia regional state and local security forces meets international legal standards, given the intensity of the conflict and the organisation and nature of the non-state armed group involved in the violence.

Hence, the conflict is governed by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the 1977 Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, and customary IHL.

International law defines rape as an act of sexual penetration or “invasion,” however slight, when committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion, by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or against a person incapable of giving genuine consent.⁹⁸

Rape and other forms of sexual violence committed while the perpetrator would have been aware of the circumstances of the conflict are violations of IHL and may amount to a war crime. Deliberately killing civilians and fighters who are no longer taking part in hostilities, or are injured and unable to fight, is prohibited under IHL, and it constitutes the war crime of murder.

Rape is also a violation of a number of human rights, including the rights to equality and non-discrimination, to bodily and sexual autonomy, to physical integrity, and to the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. Hence, States are obliged under international human rights laws to respect these rights, and end sexual violence in conflict, including to protect those at risk, bring perpetrators to justice, and ensure timely access to comprehensive services, justice, and reparation for survivors of sexual violence.⁹⁹

Given that nine of the survivors interviewed for this research were displaced as a result of the sexual violence committed by OLA, followed by threats issued to kill, burn their homes and further sexual violence and other forms of torture if they do not leave their homes, it is reasonable to believe that the armed group’s fighters are using sexual violence to expel a section of the civilian population. This is further demonstrated by the repeated incidents of sexual violence, threats, and orders to leave the area directed at survivors who remained after enduring the violence. OLA fighters also burned homes to forcibly displace survivors and their families, further reinforcing the pattern of ordering civilians to leave an area. Survivors stated that fighters would execute those who refused to leave. This act constitutes the expulsion of a civilian population, which is forbidden under customary IHL.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ 123 See ICC, Elements of Crimes, Element 1, Article 7 (1) (g)-1 and Article 8(2)(e)(vi)-1(2). Coercive circumstances that negate consent include circumstances created by the perpetrator, such as fear of violence, duress, detention contexts, and the abuse of power. Consent is also negated when the perpetrator takes advantage of coercive circumstances that already exist, even if they are not of their own making, such as those already inherent to an armed conflict. For more on this, see Amnesty International, Rape and sexual violence: Human rights law and standards in the International Criminal Court, 2011, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/32000/ior530012011en.pdf>

⁹⁹ CEDAW general recommendations 19 and 35 prohibit gender-based violence including rape as a human rights violation and set out the steps states are required to take in order to comprehensively respond. General Recommendation 30 specifically focuses on the obligations of duty bearers in conflict, conflict prevention and post-conflict contexts, and reaffirms State obligations to take action to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in conflict including rape.

¹⁰⁰ ICRC, Customary IHL, Rule 129.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I hope they [the OLA fighters] will return to their home and we will have peace. That is how what happened to me can end.”¹⁰¹

Hawetan, an 18-year-old survivor of CRSV

The armed conflict in the Oromia region has caused immense suffering for the civilian population over the past seven years. As detailed in this investigation, the abuses have led to complex and, at times, irreversible damage to the lives, property, and well-being of civilians.

The conflict has not been sufficiently monitored by either national or international actors, mainly due to the draconian measures imposed by federal and regional government authorities against independent investigations into human rights violations in the country. Survivors are demanding an end to violations of their rights by all armed actors and continue their quest for justice and reparation, including guarantees of non-repetition.

During the process of compiling this investigation, all the survivors, interlocutors, experts and the consultant interviewed by Amnesty’s researchers expressed fear of reprisal from OLA fighters and government authorities.

Amnesty International is alarmed by the finding that the intimidation and harassment of both healthcare providers and civilians by the OLA fighters was among the main factors preventing survivors of violence from accessing SRH services, including post-rape care. Ethiopian authorities must ensure that this stops immediately. Both parties to the conflict are bound by international law to protect medical and humanitarian workers at all times against any attacks.

The findings of this investigation are only the tip of the iceberg of what women and girls are being subjected to in the context of the conflict in Oromia region, and it should lead to further inquiries into CRSV, the mass displacement of women and girls, summary executions, and other gross violations of IHL and IHRL. Amnesty also documented the socio-economic impact of the violence and other human rights violations experienced by survivors of CRSV, which must be urgently addressed by the government and humanitarian actors.

Amnesty International asked survivors what getting justice for the human rights violations they experienced means to them. While some expressed an urgent need for peace and reconciliation alongside investigation and the prosecution of the crimes committed, others expressed a strong desire for retribution against perpetrators.

Amnesty International calls for a thorough, effective, independent, and impartial investigation into crimes under international law committed by all parties to the conflict, and, where there is sufficient evidence, prosecution of crimes under international law, including alleged war crimes. This must be done in line with international standards on the right to a fair trial and without resort to the death penalty.

Below are some of the survivors’ demands for justice expressed in their own words:



- “The fact that you spoke with us feels like I got justice. I want to go back to my village and live with my neighbours.”

¹⁰¹ Interview by voice call with a survivor, July 2025, Number six.

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- "We are children of one father. I wish we would stand to worship God altogether. I wish God would change the way they think, and they would come back to peace. I only want to see peace. God didn't teach us to kill those who killed us; he taught us to forgive."
 - "If it is possible to find them, I hope to see justice done, so that what happened to me and others can end." "But I wish to see them get the punishment they deserve, so that others can learn from that."
 - "I consider peace to be justice. I wish we could live together after reconciliation."

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE OROMO LIBERATION ARMY [OLA]

- Immediately issue an order to all OLA fighters to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law.
- Publicly acknowledge the abuses endured by survivors by OLA fighters.
- Immediately disarm and demobilize fighters and/or units who committed sexual violence, other forms of torture, killing, forced displacement, and other crimes under international law.
- Immediately end the torture and other ill treatment of civilians, particularly women and girls, including sexual violence, sexual slavery, executions, and forced displacement.
- Immediately stop the intimidation and harassment of health care services providers and survivors who seek medical care and support for sexual violence.
- Raise awareness and train OLA fighters on IHL to end attacks against civilian populations, and to protect civilians, their properties, and civilian infrastructure.
- Ensure that survivors who have been expelled and displaced from their homes are able to safely return to their homes and resume their daily lives.
- Collaborate on and support a thorough, effective, independent, and impartial investigation by legitimate authorities into the violations of IHRL and IHL in the context of the armed conflict in the Oromia region.

TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

- Conduct a comprehensive, independent, and credible investigation on rape and sexual violence in the context of the conflict in Oromia by OLA fighters, with a view to ensuring justice and accountability to the survivors.
- Investigate the conflict-related sexual violence committed by ENDF soldiers, as documented by Amnesty International in this report, as well as crimes under international law documented in Amnesty International's previous research, relating to both the 2020 armed conflict in Tigray and the ongoing conflict in the Amhara region.
- End the increasing harassment of members of the national human rights and civil society community, as well as journalists, and ensure they have access to the Oromia region to further investigate the alleged violations of international law.
- Respond favorably, without further delay, to the visit request from the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
- Invite and facilitate access to the Oromia region for other relevant thematic UN Special Procedure mandates and UN agencies, international human rights and humanitarian law organisations, and the ACHPR to investigate the abuses.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL PANEL OF MEDIATORS BETWEEN THE OLA AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA, NAMELY THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY ON DEVELOPMENT (IGAD) AND THE GOVERNMENTS OF KENYA, NORWAY, AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (USA)

- Ensure that your panel members engage with the parties to the conflict to ensure that human rights violations against women and girls stop, and seek measures to ensure justice and accountability for survivors.
- Ensure that survivors' voices and demands are heard and acknowledged in any negotiation process for full recognition, justice, accountability, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition of the violations endured by civilians amid the conflict.
- Ensure that any peace or cessation of hostilities agreement does not compromise justice and accountability as guaranteed under international law.
- Urge both parties to the conflict to end ongoing violations of crimes under international law, and particularly engage the commanders of the OLA to end the perpetration of sexual violence and other abuses against women and girls in the Oromia region.
- Urge international and regional intergovernmental bodies, humanitarian actors, and the broader international community to work to increase support to healthcare centres to provide sufficient sexual and reproductive health services to survivors, and other urgent humanitarian assistance as identified by the UN and its partners. To the Ethiopian diaspora associations, particularly to the Oromo community
- Recognise and increase awareness of the experiences of survivors of sexual violence in the Oromia region.
- When possible, engage parties to the conflict directly, advocate for the protection of civilians, their property, and infrastructure protected under the International Law of Armed Conflict.
- Engage Ethiopian authorities, international and regional human rights bodies for the protection of civilians in the Oromia region, for justice and accountability.

TO HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

- Ensure the timely provision of and access to comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and support to survivors of sexual violence in the context of the ongoing armed conflict in Oromia, including displaced populations and women and girls IDPs. Such services should include prompt medical and forensic examination in accordance with survivors' wishes, including trauma support and counselling; sexual and reproductive health care, including emergency contraception, HIV counselling, testing, and post-exposure prophylaxis; testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, the option for safe abortion and post-abortion care, and maternal health support; legal and financial assistance.

TO RELIGIOUS AND FAITH ORGANISATIONS IN THE OROMIA REGION

- Ensure that survivors of Conflict Related Sexual Violence access healthcare services, including at the health centers established by religious organisations.

TO THE ETHIOPIAN DIASPORA ASSOCIATIONS, PARTICULARLY TO THE OROMO COMMUNITY

- Immediately and publicly recognise the experiences of survivors. Advocate and increase pressure for both parties to the conflict to protect civilians, their property, and infrastructure protected under international law.
- Publicly advocate for all parties in the conflict to respect IHL and IHRL.
- Engage the respective state authorities of your countries of residence to engage Ethiopian authorities, international and regional human rights bodies for the protection of civilians in the Oromia region, for justice and accountability.

- Ensure that any support provided by diaspora associations to parties to the conflict does not contribute to violations of international humanitarian law or other international legal obligations.

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“NO ONE CAME TO MY RESCUE”

GANG RAPE, SEXUAL SLAVERY, AND MASS DISPLACEMENT OF WOMEN IN OROMIA, ETHIOPIA

The armed conflict between the OLA and the Ethiopian Army has been ongoing since 2019, causing immense suffering for the civilian population.

Due to the relentless attacks on civil society and the media, the experiences of civilians have not been adequately documented, allowing human rights violations to continue with little to no accountability.

It is in this context that Amnesty International conducted its research, which is only the tip of the iceberg. Nevertheless, the findings provide critical evidence that should prompt meaningful action, amplify survivors' voices, ensuring their experiences are heard and acknowledged.