

# ETHIOPIA



## THE ISSUE:

Ethiopia is at a crossroads, and the United States must do more to make sure that the reforms enacted by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed do not fail. Over the past 18 months, Ethiopia has gone through profound changes. Thousands of political prisoners have been released, and some restrictive laws have been revised with more under review. Political parties have been unbanned and Prime Minister Abiy signed a peace treaty with Eritrea ending a 20-year-old border dispute.

However, ethnic clashes and religious conflicts have resulted in the displacement of millions. In response to the assassination of political leaders, the government has arrested numerous people, some without due process. Further, there are growing concerns over the failure of security forces to protect people and property. In the context of ongoing political discourse, media and social outlets in Ethiopia and outside the country have become platforms for inflammatory language and misinformation.

The government of Prime Minister Abiy must address the alarming rise in violence that made Ethiopia the country with the highest number of internally displaced persons in the world in 2018. Most recently, in October 2019, the government itself reported 86 people killed and more than 200 injured in protests. Ten of those were killed in direct clashes with security forces, while the others were killed by intercommunal violence. Over 400 people have been arrested in connection with the violence. In the Western Wollega and Guji Zones (both in Oromia), civilians have been massively impacted by clashes between government security forces and factions of the Oromo Liberation Army.

There have been reports of attacks on churches and mosques in different parts of the country. Additionally, there are reports showing an escalating number of deaths among university students in the various higher education institutions of Ethiopia, which also resulted in disruption of learning and teaching processes. The violence is contributing to and exacerbating a humanitarian crisis of over three million internally displaced persons in Ethiopia according to a figure provided by Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). There are growing concerns over the instability, the increasing levels of violence, and the deterioration of the rule of law.

With a general election scheduled for August 2020, there are fears that the violence will spread and could lead to a breakup of the country in an already volatile region of Africa dealing with extremist jihadists operating in and around Somalia (al Shabab) and a fragile peace between Ethiopia and the countries with which it has gone to war, as well as neighboring countries trying to move towards post-conflict reconstruction (Sudan and South Sudan).

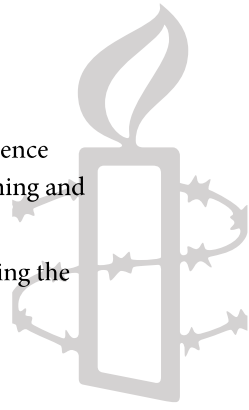
## TALKING POINTS:

Ethiopia's planned elections in 2020 could determine the fate of the country and impact regional stability. The Abiy administration must do its part to ensure that the Ethiopian people can fully realize the reforms and respect for human rights and inclusive governance that they have fought for over the last several years.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Publicly reiterate the importance of Ethiopia moving forward towards improved governance and respect for human rights and call for all people living in Ethiopia and abroad to do their part to prevent the spread or escalation of violence.

- Call upon the Department of State to work with USAID and civil society to design and implement a violence prevention mechanism with civil society organizations in Ethiopia to monitor and serve as an early warning and response system to mitigate risks of ethnic- and religious-based violence.
- Ensure rule of law and respect for human rights by government actors and non-state actors alike, including the creation of a safe space for human rights concerns to be addressed without the threat of violence.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

Adotei Akwei  
Deputy Director, Advocacy & Government Relations  
(202) 509-8148  
AAkwei@aiusa.org