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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 February 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Freedom of Religion and Belief in Ethiopia

Introduction:

Freedom of religion or belief in the context of human rights is linked to the freedom of a person to embrace certain religious beliefs and practices, being one of the human rights guaranteed in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, Ethiopia is a sample of some African communities that still witness a wide range of violations of human rights in the context of freedom of religion, which creates the necessity of monitoring the reality of freedom of religion in the Ethiopian community as one of these communities.

Reality of Freedom of Religion in Ethiopia:

Despite Ethiopia's Constitution Article 27 (1) guarantees the freedom of religion by stipulating that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice"(1), Muslims, who make up nearly 33% of Ethiopia's population, are scattered across different Ethiopian regions and subjected to various forms of persecution including the following:

- **Demolishing Worship Places:**

While Ethiopia's constitution assures in its article 27(3) that "No one shall be subject to coercion or other means which would restrict or prevent his freedom to hold a belief of his choice"(2), the Ethiopian government continues to demolish Muslims' worshiping places, directly preventing them from practicing their belief.

In 2023, Muslims in Ethiopia witnessed a wide range of violations of human rights against their places of worship, in the context of the Ethiopian government's controversial urban planning project to provide new spaces of investment by turning some areas on the ground into government properties.

Elizka Relief Foundation managed to monitor some incidents of demolishing mosques and places of worship on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, Specifically in Shaggar City. Prior to Ramadan, which came in March, the Supreme Council of Ethiopian Islamic Affairs stated that 10 different mosques are to be demolished. Despite several appeals and urgent calls sent by Muslims to prime minister's office. The mayor of Shaggar City disregarded all calls and demonstrations continued till after Ramadan(3). Elizka Relief Foundation also observed the continuity of the demolitions that raised the number of demolished mosques to 19 mosques during May(4). by June the number of incidents continued rising reaching a total of 22 demolitions of mosques(5).

- **Persecution of Religious Leaders:**

In 2023, Elizka Relief Foundation documented numerous incidents of persecution and surveillance targeting Islamic leaders throughout the year. On February 10, 2023, seven Muslim elder leaders were arrested after refusing to relinquish control of the largest mosque in town(6). These actions have sparked anger and unrest within the Islamic community, as they protest against the persecution and harassment of their religious leaders.

- **Violating Peaceful Assembly Rights:**

The controversial demolishing mosques strategy of the government erupted Addis Ababa outskirts' The government's controversial strategy of demolishing mosques has triggered outrage among Muslims on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. In response, Muslims organized several peaceful protests during the same period. However, Ethiopian security forces engaged in practices that violated the constitutionally guaranteed right to peaceful assembly(7). On May 26, 2023, Elizka Relief Foundation observed a peaceful protest organized by a group of Muslim worshippers after Friday prayers at the Grand Anwar Mosque in Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian security forces responded by using tear gas and firing shots, resulting in the deaths of two citizens and injuries to dozens of others(8). Approximately 140 protesters were also arrested(9).

In the following week after the May 26th protest, Elizka Relief Foundation documented aggressive actions by government security officers who used excessive force against individuals leaving the Grand Anwar Mosque after prayers. These actions resulted in the deaths of at least eight people(10).

- **Muslims Escaping Persecution:**

The ongoing incidents of religious persecution against Muslims in Ethiopia have led to a steady increase in the number of refugees fleeing the country in search of a more tolerant religious environment. Elizka Relief Foundation has monitored published reports about Ethiopian refugees, including Muslim refugees, who seek refuge in several African countries, such as:

- **Oromos in Egypt:** The implementation of the "integrated Addis Ababa Master Plan," aimed at expanding the Ethiopian capital, has been a direct motivation for Oromos, one of the largest ethnic groups in Ethiopia that includes Muslim members, to flee to countries like Egypt. They seek peace and acceptance for their religious beliefs in other host communities after enduring prolonged periods of persecution in their own country.
- **Oromos in Kenya:** Muslims belonging to the Oromo ethnicity face significant ethnic persecution in Ethiopia due to their ethnic and religious identity. Many Oromos have fled Ethiopia and sought refuge in Kenya to escape the persecution they face at the hands of the Ethiopian government. However, their reality in Kenya as a host community is not necessarily better, as they continue to face further persecution(11).
- **Oromos in Somalia:** A published report from 2007 confirms the reality of persecution faced by Oromos, an ethnic group that includes Muslims, who have suffered for many years under the Ethiopian government. This persecution has compelled thousands of them to flee to Somalia and seek refuge in a host society that can accommodate their cultural and religious orientations(12). Elizka Relief Foundation has recorded that 41,000 Oromo refugees currently reside in Somalia, having escaped religious and political persecution in Ethiopia(13).

Recommendations:

- Elizka Relief Foundation recommends Ethiopia's government to open a dialogue with Muslim sect leaders about the government's controversial urban planning project to reach a consensus on the demolition of mosques.
- Elizka Relief Foundation recommends Ethiopian government to revive its commitment to Article 27 of the Ethiopian Constitution and rely on it to stop persecuting the leaders of the Islamic sect.
- Elizka Relief Foundation thinks that the Ethiopian government should respect protesters' right to peaceful assembly that is guaranteed by the constitution.
- Elizka Relief Foundation strongly support holding security forces involved in committing acts of violence or human rights violations against peaceful demonstrators accountable and combating impunity.
- Elizka Relief Foundation calls on the Ethiopian government to release all Muslim prayers who got arrested during the Grand Anwar Mosque peaceful protest, to create a path for peaceful dialogue with the Muslim sect.

(1) Freedom of Religion, Ethiopian human rights commission, <https://bitly.ws/3aFtr>

(2) Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Refworld, <https://bitly.ws/3aHo2>

(3) Dozen mosques demolished in the Vicinity of Addis Ababa, Ethio negari, <https://bitly.ws/3aH3D>

(4) Religious Persecution: Why Does Abiy Ahmed's Government Demolish Mosques and Desecrate the Quran in Ethiopia?, Al-Estiklal Newspaper, <https://bitly.ws/3aGTL>

- (5) Demolishing Mosques in Ethiopia: Urbanization or Islamophobia, Politics today,
<https://bitly.ws/3aGsb>
- (6) EPO February 2023 Monthly: Religious Disputes and Government Involvement in Ethiopia, EPO,
<https://bitly.ws/3aHk8>
- (7) Op, Cite, Demolishing Mosques in Ethiopia: Urbanization or Islamophobia?
- (8) Ibid
- (9) Thousands Attend Funeral for Four Muslims Killed by Police in Addis Ababa, Ethiopian citizen,
<https://bitly.ws/3aGL6>
- (10) Op, Cite, Demolishing Mosques in Ethiopia: Urbanization or Islamophobia?
- (11) Ethiopian Oromo refugees face bribes, harassment in Kenya, Refworld, <https://bitly.ws/3aLHC>
- (12) Oromo refugees reportedly detained and lynched in Somalia, Sudan tribute,
<https://bitly.ws/3aLVG>
- (13) World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Somalia, Refworld,
<https://bitly.ws/3aLW8>