



Amhara Advocacy Group in Europe

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AAGE Statement — Amhara Detainees Who Refused to Sign Confessions: Where Are They?

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Alert

The Amhara Advocacy Group in Europe (AAGE) calls on the Ethiopian authorities to disclose publicly where each of the Amhara detainees who refused to sign a confession document is being held, and to release them.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission itself acknowledges that 28 detainees in a single case file have remained in prison because they did not apply for a pardon ([The Reporter](#)). The [AAA](#) counts, across all case files, 29 detainees in this situation as of 23 September. **On the evening of 25 September, several of them were removed from Kaliti prison and dispersed to different locations.** This is reported by three sources: an alert sent to AAGE by Genocide Prevention in Ethiopia (GPE), an [urgent update from the AAA](#) (26 September) and an [article by Meseret Media](#) (27 September). For at least three of them, including two journalists, the place of detention remains unknown.

GPE's alert has since been publicly confirmed and detailed by the AAA and Meseret Media. AAGE cannot establish whether these three sources are independent of one another, and sets out below the points on which they differ. The transfer from Abba Samuel on 26 August rests on Meseret Media, relayed by Borkena. The context of these transfers is already established by several independent sources. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission acknowledges that these detainees remain in prison because they did not apply for a pardon; CPJ, Wazema and the Ethiopian press document the pressure placed on them to sign confessions, and their refusal.

What happened on 25 September, according to three sources

GPE's alert (25 September). Sent to AAGE, it states that seven of the 29 detainees who refuse the confession document were removed from Kaliti prison, in Addis Ababa, to an unknown location, among them Dr Tewodros Hailemariam, Dr Sisay Awgichew, Dr

Wondwossen Assefa and Michael (Mike) Melak. It adds that a thirtieth detainee was recently released.

The AAA's urgent update (26 September). According to the [AAA](#), seven of the 29 detainees have been taken to undisclosed locations since the evening of 25 September. Dr Wondwossen Assefa was transferred from Kaliti to Kilinto prison, separated from the other detainees in an area called "Zone 6" and placed in a cramped cell; already suffering from health problems, including chronic pain, he has seen his condition seriously deteriorate. The transfer was reportedly carried out on "orders from above", attributed to an official identified as "Commissioner Teklu".

Meseret Media's article (27 September). According to [Meseret Media](#), the journalists, politicians and academics held together in a single cell at Kaliti were dispersed to different locations on Friday 25 September at around 5 pm, on the orders of the prison management; more than twenty detainees are reportedly affected. The outlet reports that:

- Dr Wondwossen Assefa, who is ill, was taken at night to Kilinto, to "Zone 6", where only members of the security forces and police are held; refusing to enter, he was still outside the zone at the time of publication, a fact the outlet says it confirmed;
- Dr Tewodros Hailemariam and Dr Sisay Awgichew were transferred to Kilinto, Zone 4;
- Michael Melak and two other detainees were taken to Abba Samuel prison;
- Yohannes Buayalew, Dawit Begashaw and Esubalew Belete were placed in isolation, in a place called "Tanker", alongside detainees who committed serious crimes;
- the whereabouts of the journalists Gobeze Sisay and Abay Zewdu, of Menber Alemu and of other detainees remain unknown.

Asked about the reasons for these transfers, officials reportedly cited an "order from above" and instructions from "Commissioner Teklu".

Points of divergence. GPE and the AAA speak of seven detainees transferred, Meseret Media of more than twenty. The AAA describes Zone 6 as reserved for military personnel facing serious criminal charges, Meseret Media for members of the security forces and police.

The day before, on 24 September, the AAA had published a [statement](#) ([PDF](#)) listing by name the 29 prisoners of conscience still detained as of 23 September. The four people named in the 25 September alert appear on this list.

Their detention at Kaliti since May is reported by two sources. According to the [AAA](#) (27 May 2026), 57 detainees were transferred there on 10 May, including Dr Tewodros Hailemariam, Dr Sisay Awgichew and Dr Wondwossen Assefa. [Borkena](#) (13 May), for its part, reported, citing a prison source, the unannounced transfer of some fifty political prisoners, including Wondwossen Assefa, ahead of the June elections.

To AAGE's knowledge, as of the date of this statement, neither the Ethiopian authorities nor the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has commented on these transfers.

The context, established by several sources

A conditional release. On 10 September 2026, the eve of the Ethiopian New Year, the government released more than 600 federal detainees from the Amhara and Oromia regions. According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), those convicted were pardoned and the charges against the others were conditionally dropped ([The Reporter](#), [Fana](#)). The EHRC itself acknowledges that 28 detainees in the same case file remained in prison because they did not submit a pardon application ([The Reporter](#)).

The content of the document. According to the text reported by [Borkena](#), citing Meseret Media, the signatory must admit that taking part in the struggle waged by "the extremist group" in Amhara was a mistake, and apologise to the government and the people. They must also take responsibility for a stated number of deaths and amount of destruction, and accept in advance that the government may "take any action" against them. The [AAA](#) describes clauses of the same nature.

Pressure already condemned by CPJ. On 13 August 2026, the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) condemned this practice in the case of five journalists held for three years without trial. Their lawyer, Solomon Gezahagn, states that prison officials threatened his clients and separated them from other prisoners to make them sign. He also points out that under Ethiopian law, a pardon presupposes a final conviction, a condition that does not apply to them. On 24 September, [CPJ Africa](#) renewed this call. It asked President Taye Atske Selassie, who had just affirmed before the UN General Assembly Ethiopia's commitment to human dignity and justice, to release these five journalists immediately.

A collective and public refusal. According to [Wazema](#) (18 August), around 300 detainees were presented with the document and some thirty refused to sign it, including Yohannes Buayalew, Meskerem Abera, Gobeze Sisay, Dr Sisay Awgichew and Dr Wondwossen Assefa. In a letter reviewed by [Wazema](#) (13 August), thirty defendants refuse to sign a document that would require them to admit guilt and take responsibility for the crisis in Amhara; they refuse to waive their presumption of innocence and their right to defend themselves in court. [APA News](#) reported this joint response the same day, in which the detainees describe the conditions as legally and morally unacceptable.

The journalist Mintesinot Melaku sets out their central argument: their trials are not over, so a pardon cannot apply ([Martin Plaut](#), 19 September). The organisation Genocide Prevention in Ethiopia (GPE) had issued a "red alert" about them as early as 18 August. It updated it on 10 September, publishing the list of the 30 detainees excluded from the release ([GPE on X](#)).

A precedent one month ago. According to Meseret Media, cited by [Borkena](#) on 27 August, detainees who had refused to sign were taken from Abba Samuel prison to an undisclosed location on the night of 26 August 2026. They are Sisay Melkamu, Belay Sisay, Marew Sileshi and Colonel Solomon Teferi, whose fate was then unknown. Borkena already reported fears that the other detainees would suffer the same treatment.

The 29 detainees

The list below reproduces the one published by the [AAA on 24 September 2026](#), as of 23 September. Occupations are those given by the AAA, except for Firdu Tafere, described as an engineer in the detainees' letter of January 2025. The last column indicates what the sources report.

No.	Name	ስም	Occupation	Reported situation
1	Yohannes Buayalew	ዮሃንስ ቢያለው	Politician	Refused to sign (Borkena); placed in isolation ("Tanker") on 25 Sept. (Meseret)
2	Dr Wondwossen Assefa	ዶ/ር ወንድወሰን አሰፋ	—	Transferred from Kaliti to Kilinto, "Zone 6", on 25-26 Sept.; health seriously deteriorated (AAA , Meseret)
3	Dr Tewodros Hailemariam	ዶ/ር ቴዎድሮስ ኃይለማርያም	Politician	Transferred from Kaliti to Kilinto, Zone 4, on 25 Sept. (Meseret)
4	Dr Sisay Awgichew	ዶ/ር ሲሳይ አውግቸው	—	Transferred from Kaliti to Kilinto, Zone 4, on 25 Sept. (Meseret); bail revoked in March (DW , AAA transl.)
5	Dr Meseret Kelemwork	ዶ/ር መሠረት ቀለመወርቅ	—	—
6	Dr Zerihun Bahriew	ዶ/ር ዘሪሁን ባህሪው	—	—
7	Meskerem Abera	መስከረም አበራ	Journalist	Pressured to confess (CPJ)
8	Genet Asmamaw	ገነት አስማማው	Journalist	Pressured to confess (CPJ)
9	Gobeze Sisay	ጎበዜ ሲሳይ	Journalist	Pressured to confess (CPJ); whereabouts unknown since 25 Sept. (Meseret)

No.	Name	ስም	Occupation	Reported situation
10	Dawit Begashaw	ዳዊት በጋሻው	Journalist	Pressured to confess (CPJ); placed in isolation ("Tanker") on 25 Sept. (Meseret)
11	Abay Zewdu	አባይ ዘውዱ	Journalist	Pressured to confess (CPJ); whereabouts unknown since 25 Sept. (Meseret)
12	Alelign Mihretu	አለልኝ ምህረቱ	Lawyer	—
13	Menber Alemu	መንበር አለሙ	—	Whereabouts unknown since 25 Sept. (Meseret)
14	Michael (Mike) Melak	ማይክ መላክ	—	Transferred from Kaliti to Abba Samuel on 25 Sept. (Meseret)
15	Eskinder Shifferaw	አስክነድር ሽፈራው	—	—
16	Yared Girma	ያሬድ ግርማ	—	—
17	Firdu Tafere	ኢ/ር ፍርዱ ታፈረ	Engineer	—
18	Dessalegn Ejigu	ደሳለኝ እጅጉ	—	—
19	Chanyalew Zeyede	ጫንያለው ዘየደ	—	—
20	Esubalew Belete	እሱባለው በለጠ	—	Placed in isolation ("Tanker") on 25 Sept. (Meseret)
21	Asaminew Tadesse	አሳምነው ታደሰ	—	—
22	Mesele Cheru	መሠለ ቸሩ	—	—
23	Hiwot Alemayehu	ህይወት አለማየሁ	—	—
24	Halima Mehamed	ሃሊማ መሐመድ	—	—
25	Sisay Melkamu	ሲሳይ መልካሙ	—	Taken from Abba Samuel to an unknown location on 26 Aug. (Borkena)
26	Tadesse Wedayenaw	ታደሰ ወዳይነው	—	—
27	Marew Sileshi	ማረው ስለሺ	—	Taken from Abba Samuel to an unknown location on 26 Aug. (Borkena)

No.	Name	ስም	Occupation	Reported situation
28	Belay Sisay	በላይ ሲሳይ	—	Taken from Abba Samuel to an unknown location on 26 Aug. (Borkena)
29	Muluken Tesfaye	ሙሉቀን ተስፋዬ	—	—

For the other detainees on the list, the sources do not specify their situation since 25 September. The list of 30 names published by [GPE on 10 September](#) includes the 29 names above, plus that of Colonel Solomon Teferi, taken from Abba Samuel on 26 August. He no longer appears on the AAA list of 23 September.

What they are accused of

According to their lawyers and supporters, no final judgment has been handed down in the terrorism cases for which they are detained. This is the central argument behind their refusal to apply for a pardon ([Martin Plaut](#)). Those whose case files are documented have been prosecuted since 2023 or 2024 under Ethiopia's Proclamation on the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism. Its heaviest provision, which carries the death penalty, targets anyone who "terrorizes or spreads fear" among the public "with the intention of advancing political, religious or ideological causes" ([CPJ](#)). Two case files are publicly documented.

The case of the 51, registered under the name of Dr Wondwossen Assefa (charges filed in June 2023). It brings together 51 defendants ([DW, AAA transl.](#); [Ambassador Media](#)), including Dr Wondwossen Assefa, Dr Sisay Awgichew and the journalists Meskerem Abera, Genet Asmamaw, Gobeze Sisay and Dawit Begashaw ([BBC Amharic, AAA transl.](#)). According to the charge sheet reviewed by [CPJ](#), the prosecution presents an "Amhara Fano Unity Council" as a "clandestine organization" used for terrorist activities, and names Meskerem Abera as its deputy coordinator. Gobeze Sisay is charged in connection with a video in which he accuses the ruling party of dividing the Amhara region and calls for its removal ([CPJ](#)). According to BBC Amharic, Dr Sisay Awgichew is accused of taking part in the killing of regional officials and of terrorist acts aimed at seizing power by force, alongside the Fano ([FSX Business, citing BBC Amharic](#)); in early 2026, his charge was requalified as an offence eligible for bail ([DW, AAA transl.](#)). The defence has repeatedly objected to the lack of specific facts; the amended charge sheet of November 2024 names alleged victims without describing the incidents concerning them ([CPJ](#)). The journalists' defence hearing is scheduled for 19 November 2026 ([CPJ](#)).

The case of the 52 (charges filed in March 2024). State media announced terrorism charges against Christian Tadele, Yohannes Buayalew and 50 other people, brought by the Ministry of Justice directorate in charge of organised crime ([Addis Standard](#)). The journalist Abay Zewdu was charged on 27 March 2024 together with 51 other people, including opposition politicians. The prosecution accuses him of conspiring to overthrow the government by force; the charge sheet relies in particular on a message he received from an unidentified sender and disseminated ([CPJ](#)). His next hearing is scheduled for 16 October 2026 (CPJ).

For the other detainees on the list, the charges are not documented in the public sources consulted. AAGE's investigation "[Voices Behind the Walls](#)" (July 2026) documents eleven individual cases, several of which concern detainees on this list. In their letter of refusal, the detainees state that they will not waive their presumption of innocence or their right to defend themselves in court; this is precisely what the confession document asks them to give up ([Wazema](#)).

What the law says

Confessions under duress are prohibited, under Ethiopian law and under international law.

- **Ethiopian Constitution, Article 19(5):** persons arrested shall not be compelled to make confessions, and any evidence obtained under coercion is inadmissible ([text](#), [Constitute Project](#)). Articles 9(4) and 13(2) make the treaties ratified by Ethiopia part of its domestic law and require fundamental rights to be interpreted in their light ([UNHCR analysis](#)).
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 14(3)(g):** everyone charged has the right not to be compelled to confess guilt ([text](#), [OHCHR](#)). Ethiopia acceded to the Covenant on 11 June 1993 ([UN Treaty Collection](#)).
- **UN Human Rights Committee:** forcing an accused person to sign a confession under duress violates both Article 7 (prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment) and Article 14(3)(g) of the Covenant ([General Comment No. 32](#)). The Committee specifies that this protection covers any direct or indirect, physical or psychological pressure ([views in Deolall v. Guyana](#)).

Holding someone in a secret location may constitute an enforced disappearance.

- The [1992 UN Declaration](#) (resolution 47/133), adopted without a vote, provides that any enforced disappearance places the victim outside the protection of the law. It treats it as a continuing offence as long as the fate and whereabouts of the person remain concealed.

- The [2006 International Convention](#) gives the reference definition: a deprivation of liberty by agents of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge it or by concealment of the whereabouts of the person.

The Ethiopian Constitution itself, in its [Article 28\(1\)](#), lists forcible disappearances among crimes against humanity not subject to statutory limitation, which may be commuted neither by amnesty nor by pardon. Ethiopia has, however, neither signed nor ratified the 2006 Convention ([UN Treaty Collection](#)): AAGE therefore relies on the 1992 Declaration, the Covenant and the Constitution. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission itself stressed the importance of this ratification at a seminar held on 31 August 2026 with the African Commission and the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, on which it reported on 24 September, the day before the transfers ([EHRC](#)).

Incommunicado detention is not a theoretical concern in Ethiopia. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded, for 2023 alone, 243 victims of enforced disappearance or abduction in the country, and noted that after the state of emergency of August 2023, arbitrary arrests mainly targeted Amhara people ([OHCHR, June 2024](#)). The US State Department refers to "numerous reports" of enforced disappearance linked to the conflicts in Amhara and Oromia, and cites cases documented by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission of people held incommunicado in unidentified locations ([2023 report](#)). In 2026, Amnesty International noted a rise in reports of enforced disappearances of journalists ([May 2026](#)). In the case of the very detainees who are the subject of this statement, Dr Sisay Awgichew was taken by police at the gate of Kilinto prison on 25 February 2026, two days after a court ordered his release on bail ([DW, AAA transl.](#)). These elements alone do not suffice to establish a crime against humanity; they establish that the practice exists and that it has already affected these detainees.

The transfers of 25 September are now reported by three sources. For Gobeze Sisay, Abay Zewdu and Menber Alemu, whose place of detention remains unknown according to Meseret Media, as for the detainees taken from Abba Samuel on 26 August, the situation would fall within this definition if the authorities refuse to disclose where they are. This is why AAGE's first demand concerns the immediate disclosure of their place of detention.

Our demands

AAGE calls on the Ethiopian federal authorities to:

1. Disclose publicly the place of detention of each of the 29 detainees, in particular Gobeze Sisay, Abay Zewdu and Menber Alemu, whose place of detention has been unknown since 25 September, and the detainees taken from Abba Samuel on 26 August, and inform their families and lawyers.

2. Guarantee without delay their access to a lawyer, to their families and to medical care, first and foremost for Dr Wondwossen Assefa, whose health has seriously deteriorated; end their isolation and their detention alongside perpetrators of serious crimes.
3. End all pressure aimed at obtaining confessions, in accordance with Article 19(5) of the Constitution and Article 14(3)(g) of the ICCPR.
4. Release all 29 detainees unconditionally and drop the charges brought against them.

To the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which led the mediation: make public the text of the document presented to the detainees, and verify independently the place and conditions of detention of those transferred.

To international mechanisms and Ethiopia's partners, AAGE calls for an official inquiry into the fate of these detainees:

- the [UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#) and the [Special Rapporteur on torture](#);
- the [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#);
- the European External Action Service, the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa and the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI);
- the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

Amhara Advocacy Group in Europe (AAGE), Paris — 2 October 2026

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