

March 3, 2025

Reverend Franklin Graham
President and CEO
Samaritan's Purse and Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
1 Billy Graham Parkway
Charlotte, NC 28201

Subject: Urgent Appeal for Assistance in Addressing Religious Persecution and Human Rights Violations in Ethiopia

Dear Reverend Graham,

Your father, Billy Graham, introduced Emperor Haile Selassie I at the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966 with deep respect and admiration. In his speech, he highlighted several key points:

- **Recognition of Haile Selassie's Global Influence:** Billy Graham acknowledged that the emperor gained worldwide recognition, particularly during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930s, when he stood as a symbol of resilience and leadership.
- **Ethiopia's Christian Heritage:** He emphasized Ethiopia's deep Christian roots, noting that it has been a Christian nation for centuries and that the emperor was a devout follower of Christ.
- **The Emperor's Commitment to Faith and Leadership:** Your father praised Haile Selassie for incorporating Christian principles into governance, ensuring religious freedom, justice, and ethical leadership in Ethiopia.
- **A Person of Faith:** He underscored that the emperor not only ruled as a Christian leader but also personally worshiped Jesus Christ, setting an example for his people.

With this historical context in mind, we the undersigned coalition of civic and advocacy organizations write to you with deep concern regarding your upcoming visit to Ethiopia at the invitation of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. While we respect and appreciate your commitment to faith, humanitarian work, and global peace, we feel compelled to bring to your attention the dire humanitarian and religious crises unfolding in Ethiopia under the current administration.

Unlike your father's visit, which was marked by reverence for Ethiopia's Christian heritage, your visit comes at a time when the government is engaged in a full-scale assault on one of the world's most ancient Christian churches.

Ethiopia, a nation with a rich spiritual heritage, has been experiencing an alarming rise in religious persecution, ethnic violence, and human rights abuses. The Ethiopian government's ongoing policies and military actions have led to widespread atrocities and systemic targeting of religious communities, especially Orthodox Christians and Muslims.

International Response to Atrocities in Ethiopia

In response to religious persecutions and human rights abuses, numerous international organizations and governments—including Amnesty International, the U.S. government, and global human rights groups—have condemned the atrocities taking place in Ethiopia. The American Ethiopian Public Affairs Committee (AEPAC) has urged Ethiopia’s development partners and human rights organizations to demand an end to the civil war, halt extrajudicial killings, and secure the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained individuals. Additionally, AEPAC calls for decisive action to prevent the continued erosion of the rule of law.

- **Amnesty International (January 28, 2025):** A report denounces the international community’s silence on the mass and arbitrary detention of thousands of Ethiopians.
- **U.S. Government:** The United States has demanded for peace, legislators including Rep. Jason Crow highlighting the ongoing human rights abuses, including those in Amhara, Tigray, and Oromia.
- **White House (Summer 2024):** The President of the United States has extended the national emergency related to Ethiopia due to the ongoing threat to peace and stability in the region.
- **Senator Jon Ossoff:** On September 27, 2023, Senator Ossoff urged the U.S. government to take prompt and prudent action to address the violence in Ethiopia.

Religious Persecution and Attacks on Clergy and Sacred Sites (refer to reference)

Religious institutions and leaders have been directly targeted, and sacred sites destroyed under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s leadership. Some of the most egregious examples include:

- **Massacres of Clergy and Monks:** In the historic Debre Elias Monastery and Debre Libanos Monastery, as well as other sacred sites, monks and priests have been brutally executed. Many were reportedly dragged from places of worship and shot in cold blood, a direct assault on the sanctity of religious life.
- **Church Burnings and Attacks:** Since July 2018, approximately 30 churches have been attacked, with more than half burned to the ground. These acts of violence have left entire communities in despair, as sacred spaces are destroyed, and worshippers are left without places for spiritual refuge.
- **Jimma Incident (February 2025):** Orchestrated attacks against followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church have been intensifying. The most recent incident occurred in February 2025, when over 2,000 homes and businesses belonging to followers of the church were reportedly destroyed, displacing many families and leaving them destitute.

- **Targeting Worshipers:** Churchgoers have been killed while attending services, and religious processions have been met with brutal state violence. These heinous acts are part of a broader campaign to intimidate and silence faith communities.
- **State Interference in Religious Affairs:** The government has sought to influence the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, threatening its autonomy and attempting to replace legitimate church leaders with government-affiliated individuals. This interference undermines the church's authority and deepens the division and tension within the religious community.
- **Destruction of Mosques:** Attacks on the Muslim community have also intensified under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's regime. Historical mosques including 19 have been demolished in Addis Ababa, the capital and various locations, contributing to a broader pattern of religious intolerance affecting all faith communities.

Religious Manipulation and Ideological Suppression

The government is systematically marginalized the role of Abrahamic religions in Ethiopian society:

- **Marginalization of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church:** The church, a cornerstone of Ethiopian identity, has faced increasing pressure, with religious leaders arrested or exiled, and state interference in its affairs growing.
- **Crackdown on Religious Expression:** Government forces have violently suppressed religious demonstrations, leading to deaths and mass arrests, violating the rights of religious communities to freely express their beliefs.

Humanitarian Crisis and Ethnic-Based Violence

Beyond religious persecution, Ethiopia is facing a broader humanitarian crisis marked by ethnic violence and human rights abuses. The Ethiopian government, in coordination with various militia groups, has allowed such violence to escalate without meaningful intervention:

- **Famine and Forced Starvation:** According to several media reports, 65% of children residing in areas on constant attack by government troops, are facing food shortage and 84% of mothers are experiencing severe food insecurity. Yale describes the situation in Northern region of Ethiopia as one of "constant hunger," with famine being used as a weapon of war.
- **Mass Displacement:** Millions of Ethiopians have been forcibly uprooted from their homes due to government-backed violence.
- **Ethnic Cleansing Campaigns:** Entire communities, particularly in Amhara and Oromia regions, have been subjected to state-sponsored massacres and forced disappearances, contributing to the world's largest internally displaced population.

Extrajudicial Killings and Drone Strikes

According to Amnesty International, the UN Office for the Coordination of Human Rights (OHCHR), UN Genocide Prevention and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reports, several Ethiopian government forces have increasingly relied on drone warfare to target civilians:

- **Drone Strikes:** Over 750 civilians, mainly children, the elderly and women, have been massacred in drone attacks alone at the ongoing Ethiopian civil war, which has been waged by the government over the past 24 months in the Amhara region.
- **Bombing of Civilian Areas:** Reports indicate that civilian homes, marketplaces, and even religious sites have been hit by airstrikes, deepening the humanitarian crisis.
- **Extrajudicial Killings and Arbitrary Detention:** Government forces continue to engage in extrajudicial killings. Witnesses report the execution of 20 civilians in a single day across multiple locations, including Gondar and Gojjam. Thousands of political prisoners, including religious leaders and dissenters, are subject to torture.
- **Mass Displacement:** Over 9 million children are currently out of school, and hundreds of schools have been shut down due to the violence, depriving millions of children of access to education and threatening Ethiopia's future.

Our Call to You

Reverend Graham, we urge you to reconsider the nature of your engagement with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Your presence at his invitation risks being seen as an endorsement of a regime responsible for the persecution of religious leaders, the destruction of holy sites, and the suffering of millions. Instead, we ask you to:

1. condemn the attacks on religious institutions and leaders in Ethiopia.
2. advocate for an end to government interference in religious affairs and demand accountability for crimes against clergy.
3. use your platform to highlight the urgent humanitarian crisis and call for an independent investigation into human rights abuse.

As faith leaders, we are called to stand against oppression and be a voice for the voiceless. We trust that your moral and spiritual leadership will serve to uplift those who are suffering and bring much-needed attention to Ethiopia's deepening crisis.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We pray that your visit will serve as a beacon of hope, justice, and true peace for all Ethiopians.

Sincerely,

Signatory Organizations:

- American Afar Diaspora (AAD)
- American Ethiopian Public Affairs Committee (AEPAC)

- Beza Orthodox Tewahido (BEZA)
- Ethiopian American Civic Council (EACC)
- Ethiopian American Development Council (EADC)
- Ethiopian American Diplomacy Network (EPDN)
- Foundation for Human Rights and Development in Ethiopia (FHRDE)
- Geda Oromo Community (GOC)
- Harari Revival Movement (HRM)
- In Defense of Christians
- Justice and Accountability in the Horn of Africa
- New York & New Jersey Tristate Hope for Ethiopia (H4E)
- United Women of the Horn
- @etHUB

References

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<https://religionunplugged.com/news/2020/11/17/ethiopias-increasing-vulnerability-to-islamic-extremism-and-what-that-means-for-the-horn-of-africa?format=amp>

<https://www.persecution.org/2020/09/08/500-christians-killed-ethiopia-since-june-report-states/>

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/xg897a/hate-speech-on-facebook-is-pushing-ethiopia-dangerously-close-to-a-genocide>

Statements from Pope Francis

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/42711/pope-francis-asks-for-prayer-for-persecuted-christians-in-ethiopia>

Here is an article from 2015

<https://theworld.org/stories/2019-09-16/uptick-church-burnings-raises-alarm-ethiopia>

"Ethiopian Orthodox Church to Address Declining Number of Faithful"

http://arhiva.spc.rs/eng/ethiopian_orthodox_church_address_declining_number_faithful.html

A powerful statement from the Minority Rights Group made in 2020

"Recent violence in Ethiopia's Oromia region shows hallmark signs of ethnic cleansing, says MRG"

<https://minorityrights.org/2020/07/22/ethnic-cleansing-oromia/>

IOM Ethiopia Publishes First Ever National Displacement Report

<https://www.iom.int/news/iom-ethiopia-publishes-first-ever-national-displacement-report>

Video narrating the issues in 2020

https://fb.watch/IS_YiouUZ1/?mibextid=Nif5oz

Testimonial - Mehabere Kidusan mini Documentary about Orthodox Christian's being persecuted in Ethiopia

<https://youtu.be/ksA4vedp3eM>

Muslims

<https://religionunplugged.com/news/2020/11/17/ethiopias-increasing-vulnerability-to-islamic-extremism-and-what-that-means-for-the-horn-of-africa?format=amp>

<https://aleteia.org/2019/12/03/in-ethiopia-peaceful-sufi-islam-is-being-replaced-by-fundamentalist-militants/>

[Ethiopia: Military Assault on a Bastion of Orthodoxy](#)

<https://iotaethio.org/>

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/>.