Unrest in Amhara region will continue, especially around the Oromo Special Zone and the North Shoa area, with clashes and attacks escalating before national elections in June.

OVERVIEW

Thousands of people protested in Amhara’s regional capital Bahir Dar and surrounding towns and cities on 20 April, claiming that the death toll from last week’s clashes between the country’s largest ethnic groups – the Oromo and Amhara has risen to over 50. This comes as the Ethiopian government declared a State of Emergency in Amhara regional state on 18 April, in response to the increased violence in the area.

Local sources citing the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence report that armed clashes have impacted Ataye city and other regions in Oromo Special Zone over the previous three days (16 – 18 April), resulting in an unspecified number of people killed, and major destruction of property.

A local official stated that in a 20 April interview that at least 18 locals had been killed in the Oromo Special Zone. Troops have now deployed to the area.

ANALYSIS

The State of Emergency follows the deaths of at least 300 people in violence in March 2021. This began after an ethnic Oromo religious leader was killed outside a mosque, triggering clashes between Oromo civilians and Amhara security forces. However, the current tensions date back at least to 2019, especially in the western area of the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

This has seen ethnic clashes that have led to several hundred casualties, and displaced persons in their thousands. The region is home to over 11 ethnic groups including the Amhara and Oromo people – conflicts have been fuelled by fractions demanding power, resources, and land on both sides of the border between the Oromia and Amhara region.
PREDICTION

• Ethnic clashes will increase ahead of the coming national elections in June, with insecurity and violence escalating in the medium term (two -six months), especially if the national elections do not produce the desired result for each ethnic group.

• The Ethiopian government will likely increase the deployment of security forces to the Oromo Special Zone and the North Shoa area in the coming days, though this will likely to be focused on the main towns as the Ethiopian armed forces are stretched both in the Amhara region, and in Tigray.

• Tensions will be exacerbated by the longstanding issues around the Grand Ethiopian Dam (GERD), which is located in Metekel Zone in the Benishangul-Gumuz region. However, troops may be redeployed to the GERD as the government faces continued tensions with Sudan and Egypt over the project.

• There are risks that aid workers may be temporarily arrested. In February 2020, near Gonder city, 15 staff and volunteers of an international NGO were detained for five days despite their belief that they had followed all required protocols.

MITIGATION

• Continue to vary routes in the area, avoid the A2 through Ataye (fighting), A3 & B31 through Bahir Dar (protests) – be aware that ethnic groups could set up temporary roadblocks.

• Avoid where possible national staff from specific ethnic groups approaching areas known to harbour different tribes. Neutral ethnic national staff should be employed.

• Ensure to have all required authorisation for planned activities.

• Restrict circle of knowledge of travel including on social media.

• Carry out key mapping of likely hotspots over the next six months.

• Use PPE where possible and ensure first aid kits up to date.

IN CASE YOU MISSED THEM

Ethiopia: Situation Report
Sexual Violence in Ethiopia, Tigray Region
Mozambique: Situation Report
Mozambique: Palma Alert
Mozambique: Ramadan Alert
Myanmar: Situation Report

This document is published by Insecurity Insight.