



Organization for Victims and Survivors(OVS)

THE DARK HISTORY OF IMPRISONMENT IN THE SOMALI REGION: A VICTIMS' PERSPECTIVE



Bayahow prisoners labour force



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Organization of Victims and Survivors (OVS) is a local organization established by victims and survivors of gross human rights violations and conflict in the Somali region, is a non-government and nonprofit making civil society organization, established in April 2019 and is registered with the Somali Regional State's Justice Bureau and Disaster Risk Management Bureau. OVS is also registered the Federal Agency for Civil Society Organization, on October 31, 2022, with registration number 6488.. The organization primarily advocates for the needs and rights of victims and survivors in terms of their resettlement, rehabilitation, physical and psycho-social wellbeing, and to contribute to sustainable justice and peace in the Somali region. Since their establishment, they have worked on a range of advocacy, lobbying and documentation initiatives to promote the rights of victims.

This report is based on a survey conducted in six zones within the Somali Regional State:

Jarar, Dollo, Erer, Korahey, Shabelle, and Nogob localities where ONLF's insurgency was most concentrated over the course of 24 years (1994-2018). In retaliation against this, as detailed in the report, the government's counter insurgency campaign was also concentrated in these six zones displaying recursive patterns of violence against civilians consistent with the policy of collective punishment underlying the government's counter insurgency strategy.

The report provides raw data showcasing the individual and collective civilian impact of the counter insurgency campaign against the ONLF in the Somali Region. More specifically, this report provides a snapshot of the experiences of victims that endured imprisonment within the Somali Region. It reveals a number of recurrent types of abuses such as torture, illegal confiscation of resources, rape, mass imprisonment, and lack of access to justice carried out indiscriminately and across gender categories. It further reveals the politically motivated nature of gross human rights violations relating to suspected affiliation with the ONLF, the frequency of these abuses, and the historical periods that they occurred in most frequently. The historical and political context within which these abuses took place provides a comprehensive representation on the implications of such abuses crucial for future research, documentation or transitional justice initiatives.

Importantly, the report also provides a statistical display illustrating the current needs and priorities of victims. Though this is based on a limited sample size, the survey reveals patterns that are indicative of the overarching needs of survivors. Such data is crucial for providing Government Institutions, Local and International Organizations, and other partners with firsthand data which may help them target their interventions or supporting programs appropriately. Lastly, the survey points towards the general feeling that a higher degree of expectation is placed on the potential support of civil society organizations compared to other institutions such as the government and traditional and religious leaders in providing support to victims.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Somali Regional State (SRS) government:

- To design and implement a comprehensive rehabilitation scheme for survivors of state violence during the government's counter insurgency campaign against the ONLF (1994-2018) recognizing the immediate necessity of providing life-saving physical and mental health care to victims.

- To establish accessible housing initiatives for survivors in order to remedy the socioeconomic impact of long-standing abuses such as the illegal confiscation of resources and loss of livelihoods.
- To task relevant financial institutions to facilitate credit /loan schemes to survivors to provide redress and support them in accessing income generating activities.
- To facilitate survivors' access to justice and establish accountability mechanisms by bringing perpetrators to justice and holding them accountable for their role in past atrocities.
- To memorialize historic sites associated with violent abuses (i.e. Jail Ogaden) in order to raise awareness for future generations, promote community healing, and ensure non repetition of past abuses.
- To assist victim-led survivor groups such as the Organization Of Victims and Survivors (OVS) and similar organizations working on addressing the immediate needs and rights of survivors of gross human rights violations in the Somali Region.
- To ensure the timely initiation of the government-sponsored and soon to be established 'Truth Seeking and Reconciliation Commission' while observing its total independence and impartiality.
- To facilitate a channel of dialogue between survivors and community elders cognizant of the role of traditional elders in providing leadership and playing mediatory roles in society. This initiative will enhance community healing and re-build trust between elders and survivors of gross human rights violations

To Development Partners and Local NGOs:

- To launch an investigation into possible crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by state institutions in the Somali region as documented by Human Rights Watch over the course of the last two decades.
- International organizations and humanitarian and development partners in the Somali Region to initiate programs that may assist survivors' efforts at reintegration

and overcoming the immediate and long-term physical, psychological and economic challenges of prolonged violence.

- To offer technical and material assistance to victim-led survivor groups in promoting the overall well-being of survivors, and contributing towards achieving sustainable justice and peace in the Somali region.

To Ethiopian Human Rights Commission:

- To order an independent and transparent investigation into evidence of torture and other serious abuses in the Somali Region.
- To liaise with locally based survivor groups on all human rights related activities concerning the Somali Region.
- To call on the Ethiopian government to support an impartial investigation into past abuses in the Somali Region.
- To take stock of human rights documentation conducted in the Somali region post-2018 such as this report for the purpose of recording and archiving evidence, and to promote awareness and non-repetition of past abuses.

BACKGROUND

The Somali Region is one of Ethiopia's 12 regional states, the second largest in land mass with an estimated population of 8-9 million. It is inhabited by the third largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, and is one of the least developed and politically marginalized regions in the country.

Since the inception of the modern Ethiopian state, the Somali Region has been the epicenter of violent conflict. This took on new forms after Britain ceded the Ogaden region and Hawd and Reserved area to Ethiopia on 23rd September 1948 and 28th February 1955 respectively, after which the region became embroiled in a war for independence and sovereignty. Nasrullah, Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), and in more recent times, Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) are key rebel movements recognized for their struggles towards self-determination in the Somali Region over the last half century.

In the context of ongoing rebellions, state violence has been a defining feature of relations between the central government and its Somali periphery. Somalis were subjected to widespread violence and human right violations across various administrations, however, the reign of Abdi Mohamud Omer (Abdi Iley) both as head of regional security (2005-2010) and president (2010-2018), is considered as an exceptionally violent period. widespread abuses including extra-judicial killings, illegal confiscation of resources, sexual abuse, mass arrests, torture and humiliation became part of the daily life for residents in the area. After ONLF's attacks on the Obale oil fields in 2007, the state cracked down on the civilian population by instituting a total ban on independent local and international media and civil society organizations, imposing an economic blockade and restricting access to humanitarian aid.

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the last and longest operating front, was engaged in a protracted war against the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) led Ethiopian government since 1994. In 2018, the group signed a peace agreement with Abiy Ahmed's government in Eritrea on 21st October, 2018. The agreement marked the formal end of ONLF's armed struggle, charting a new path for ONLF to seek its political objectives through peaceful means as constitutionally guaranteed. The agreement also included a commitment to addressing the root causes of the conflict in the Somali Region.

Prior to the Asmara peace deal, Abdi Mohamud Omar (Abdi Iley) was ousted from office on 6th August 2018 marking an end to his brutal reign. By 22nd August 2018, Mustafa Muhumed Omar was inaugurated as the acting president of the Somali Region, a human rights defender, prominent opposition figure and a victim of human rights abuses who was forcibly displaced by the deteriorating human rights situation in the region. President Mustafa initiated a series of reforms such as the official closure of Jail Ogaden – a notorious detention center- in September 2018.

MASS IMPRISONMENT IN THE SOMALI REGION

Mass imprisonment of ONLF combatants and civilians suspected of supporting the ONLF and other illegal anti-government organizations became the cornerstone of

the government's counter-insurgency strategy. This was facilitated by the militarization of the Somali Region which meant that civilians were unlawfully detained at various types of makeshift detention centers at local (kebele), district (woreda) and zonal levels, from ENDF military barracks, Liyu Police detention centers, to informal and often underground detention centers in remote areas without any due process or judicial oversight. In addition to those accused of associating with 'terrorist' organizations, other categories of prisoners included religious leaders and even government employees or officials accused of any form of dissent.

Political prisoners were often held in various informal detention centers where they were subjected to a wide range of human rights abuses. Those accused of supporting the ONLF and other designated 'terrorist' organization were routinely interrogated and held in undisclosed locations before sentencing. Others were taken directly to Jail Ogaden without being convicted in violation against the 'Treatment of Federal Prisoners Council of Ministers Regulations No. 138/2007.'

Jail Ogaden was home to thousands of prisoners from all over the Somali Region who were never charged or convicted of any crime. It was characterized by routine practices of torture and humiliation with the aim of subjecting detainees to violent forms of physical and psychological abuse. Human Rights Watch's 2018 report 'We Are Like The Dead' details the horrific experiences of inhumane and degrading treatment intended to force prisoners to confess to membership of the ONLF or to provide useful intel on the organization.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE SOMALI REGION TODAY

Over the course of the last three years, the political landscape in the Somali Region is significantly different compared to previous years. There is no armed struggle in the region, and thus no counterinsurgency operation impacting the masses. The

region is relatively peaceful, a plurality of political views is accommodated as freedom of speech has improved, and diverse political parties are active and operating. The regional administration has made tangible improvements in the fields of development, promoting business and entrepreneurship. Due to the peace and stability the region has enjoyed over the last three years, it has become an attractive destination for investors as illustrated by an increase in diaspora returnees and an overall increase in trade, movement and community interaction. However, survivors of state-sponsored human rights abuses complain the government's commitment to addressing the legacies of past abuses. For instance, a lack of institutional reform in the justice sector has undermined the possibility of victims' access to justice, as the government has not prioritized efforts to address the court system's historical lack of independence. Thus, building a transparent justice system is an important step towards providing redress to victims of widespread abuses.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

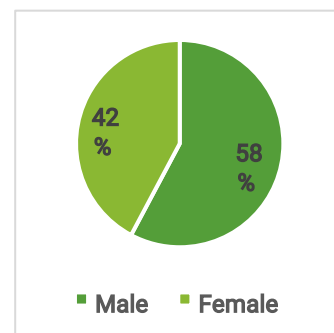
Location

The survey was conducted in six zones out of the eleven zones in the Somali Regional State: Jarar, Dollo, Erer, Korahey, Shabelle, and Nogob. The selection of these six zones were driven by one major consideration: namely that ONLF's twenty-four yearlong insurgency was concentrated in these six zones. Consequently, the government's crackdown on the group was inevitably focused on these designated areas of operation thereby impacting civilians who happen to live in these zones. Civilians in the six zones were targets of state violence in a bid to deter civilian support for the ONLF, it is also a manifestation of the government's counter-insurgency campaign centered on the policy of collective punishment.

Sex

Figure 1. Sex of victims

This survey is based on interviews conducted with 895 individuals. The survey results show that 516 persons among the victims, equivalent to 58%, were male while the remaining 377, equivalent to 42%, were female. A slim majority of the victims were male which indicates that human right violations such as arbitrary arrests, torture and other forms of abuses that occurred in the Somali Region



were indiscriminate of gender identities. This is significant considering that Somali culture places emphasis on the importance of protecting vulnerable members of society such as women, children, and the elderly. However, as indicated in this survey, women in the region were also highly impacted by gross human rights violations. This is in addition to facing unique gender-based violence as illustrated by previous research on the matter. Though beyond the scope of this report, the intersection of various types of abuses and identities is important to note. Human Rights Watch's 2008 report titled *Collective Punishment* details the use of rape and sexual violence by security forces against women and girls accused of being ONLF members for providing economic support to insurgents¹. Such accusations were made in the face of collecting firewood, water and other essentials in rural areas crucial for the day-to-day lives of both urban and rural families. As rape as a weapon of war constitutes a war crime, and a crime against humanity when systematically deployed against a civilian population, evidence of the use of rape and sexual abuse in the Somali Region indicates possible crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by state institutions.

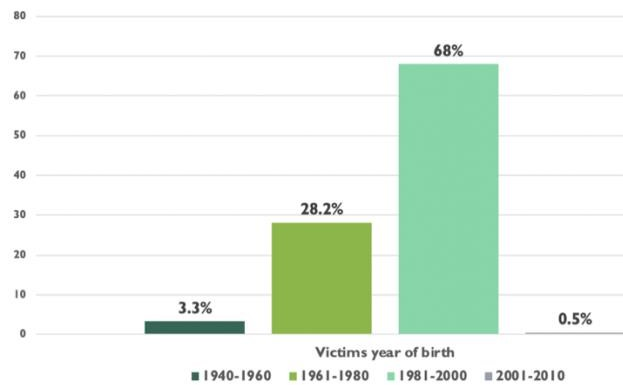
¹ <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/ethiopia0608/ethiopia0608web.pdf>

Age

The data reveals that 68% of the sampled victims were born between 1981 to 2000 G.C. meaning that their age at the time of the survey ranged between 20 – 40 years of age. This shows that a majority of the victims were arrested during their ‘golden

productive’ age, which has likely led to huge loss of productivity at personal, household and societal levels. Moreover, 28% of the victims were born between 1961 – 1980 suggesting that their ages ranged between 40 - 60 years old at the time of the survey. This age group also represents a ‘productive’ age range, and thus may also be categorized as losing out on the same opportunities associated with productivity as the previous age group. The third and fourth categories of victims include 3.3% of those who are older than 60 years and 1% of those who are younger than 20 years. These figures do not discount the serious reality of child victims of state-sponsored abuses which is often a neglected point of inquiry due to a series of methodological challenges and ethical dilemmas associated with accessing and interviewing child victims. However, previous studies show the type of abuses subjected against children such as the prevalence of child prisoners in Jail Ogaden for instance². Previous reports describe the prevalence of child prisoners imprisoned with their mothers, babies born in detention, and the high rate of infant mortality due to a lack of nutrition, hygiene and the difficult conditions endured by mothers in detention.

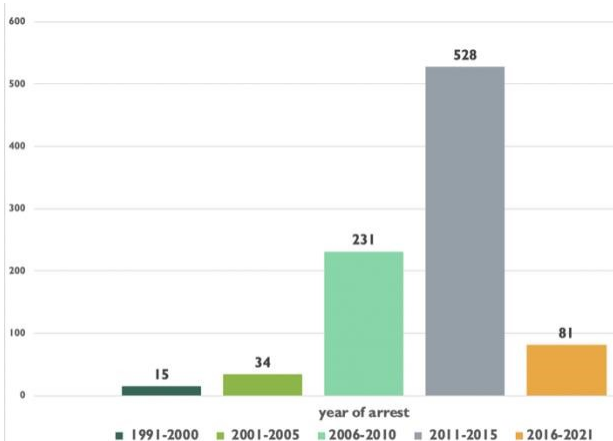
Figure 2. Date of birth range of victims



² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/04/we-are-dead/torture-and-other-humanrights-abuses-jail-ogaden-somali-regional>

PATTERNS IN ARBITRARY ARRESTS, ILLEGAL SEIZURE OF ASSETS AND COURTS

Figure 3. Year of arrest



According to the data collected, mass arrests spiked in the Somali Region between 2005–2015. A staggering 86% of interviewees were arrested within that ten-year period. There are number of explanations for this important finding such as the establishment of the Liyu Police in 2009 – a paramilitary force comprised of ethnic Somalis established to counter the ONLF. In addition to this,

another explanation for this is ONLF’s 2007 attack on Obale oil fields and the subsequent collective punishment strategy implemented by the Ethiopian government in collaboration with their affiliates in the Somali Regional Administration to root out the ONLF.

Victims reported two primary causes for their arrest. Of the victims interviewed, 85% (760 individuals) reported that the reason for their arrest was due to suspicion of being affiliated with ONLF and 14.5% (230 individuals) reported that they were arrested because a family member(s) was suspected of being an ONLF member. In addition, 56% of the victims reported that their family members were also arrested alongside them. This illustrates that individuals whose family members were arrested under the suspicion of being affiliated with the ONLF faced a higher probability of also being arrested. Most victims that were arrested and imprisoned in the Somali Region most likely had more than one family member imprisoned, thus severely increasing the negative ramifications of imprisonment in one household. This is an archetypal representation of the collective punishment strategy against civilian populations in the Somali Region developed to counter ONLF’s insurgency as well as its existing and potential supporters

Out of the victims interviewed, 84% were arrested and imprisoned once. However, a significant number -117 out of 895- which is equivalent to 14% reported that they were arrested twice, meanwhile 2% were arrested three times. In addition, 2 individuals were arrested four times and five individuals among the victims reported that they were arrested five different times. This indicates that a majority of victims were arrested and imprisoned once while also displaying the common trend of individuals being arrested multiple times, sometimes even up to five arrests per individual. Considering that access to justice remained nonexistent as all state institutions served as instruments for furthering the state's political objectives (i.e. its counter insurgency war), the frequency in the number of arrests also reveals the pattern of forced evacuations where civilians fled to neighboring countries if they happened to be released from prison. It also suggests that most victims were imprisoned once due to the sheer length of the sentences they served in light of the fact that many were released in 2018 after the collapse of Abdi Iley's administration. For instance, 38% of the interviewees were released in 2018. On this year, the region embarked upon a path towards reform permanently closing the notorious Jail Ogaden meanwhile political prisoners were pardoned by the federal government a few months prior to the Somali Region's reform in August 2018. Similarly, the impact of other political events in the Somali Region are also reflected in the data, for example, 13.5% out of the interviewees were released in 2014 and 8.6% were released in 2015. This can be explained by the 2014 and 2015 exonerations offered to prisoners in light of political pressures faced by Abdi Iley's administration primarily by diaspora media communication and internal conflict within his cabinet.

Moreover, the data further reveal that females were arrested more frequently

"I was arrested 5 times and 3 of those time I gave birth in prison. One of those times I gave birth in bathroom"- female victim

compared to their male counter parts. For example, four out of the five individuals who were arrested five times were females. Also, out of the 117 people who were arrested twice, 84 of them were females which is equivalent to 72%. As such, females faced a higher probability of multiple arrests compared to their male counterparts.

The fact that women were on average more likely to be imprisoned twice in comparison to their male counter parts is an important issue worth highlighting. This may be based on a number of factors pertaining to the reasons for their arrest, and the length of their sentence. As presented below in Table 1, men were more likely to be sentenced to 25+ years thereby reducing their general likelihood of being released to be able to be detained once again. A possible explanation for the significantly high number of males sentenced to 25+ relates to the common accusation of being an actual armed ONLF rebel. This accusation is largely specific to men who dominated the armed wing of the ONLF, and the punishment for being an armed rebel included the lengthiest sentences, and the most serious types of abuses. Conversely, women are more likely to be imprisoned more than once which may relate to the nature of crimes they are often accused of such as providing ONLF rebels with economic support particularly when seeking necessities such as water and firewood in rural areas.

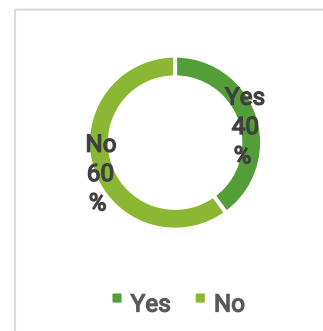
Table 1. The number of years victims were sentenced to prison analyzed by gender

Length of prison sentence (years)	Female	Male
1 - 5	127	115
6 - 10	61	56
11 - 15	22	38
16 - 20	12	36
21+	10	194

Illegal seizure of assets

Figure 4. Were assets

illegally The illegal seizure of assets is key example of economic abuse **seized from you?** subjected against civilians by the previous regime as a form of punishment. The survey revealed that no types of assets were off-limits for confiscation by the authorities. Examples included livestock (goats, camels and cattle), houses, land, gold, businesses and cash. Of the victims interviewed, almost 40% reported that some form of assets was taken from them by various government bodies at the time of their arrest or closely after. In the event of resource confiscation or theft of belongings, the items were never returned to victims.



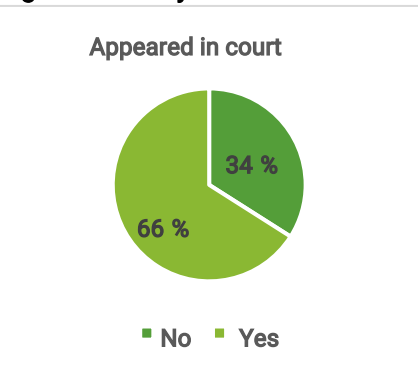
Hibo Sheikh Muse from Warder reported that 280 camels were confiscated from her family in Warder.

Similarly, Omar Muse Yusuf from Dhagaxbur town reported that 1.5 million ETB was taken from him (700,000 in cash and 800,000 worth of drugs from his pharmacy).

Access to justice and appearance in court

Lack of judicial protection is another serious violation of human rights reported by victims as illustrated by the significant number of individuals that were imprisoned without ever appearing in court. According to the survey, 303 victims which is equivalent to 34% of the interviewees stated that they never appeared in court. This suggests a blatant disregard for the rule of law, prisoners' constitutional right to appear in court, access to legal counsel and defend themselves against any allegations.

Figure 5. Were you ever taken to court?



For those who did appear in court, a majority of them did not have a lawyer and were denied access to any due process. This is evidenced by the lengthy sentences that individuals were given; for instance, 30% of victims reported that they were sentenced to more than 20 years. Among them, 189 people were sentenced to 25 years, eight people were sentenced to 30 years and three people reported being sentenced for up to 35 years. Out of these figures, data shows that most females were sentenced to less than or equal to five years due to reasons described earlier.

Moreover, according to Human Rights Watch's 2018 Jail Ogaden report, prisoners were commonly tortured during interrogations producing forced confessions to be used in a court of law often in the presence of a judge and the very torturer responsible for forcing a confession from the prisoner. Confessions often centered on admitting some form of connection to the ONLF. These trends illustrate the lack of judicial independence and institutional capacity that plagued the Somali Region. This was even more pronounced at the height of the government's counter-insurgency campaign where the justice system reflected the will of the executive rather than functioning independently. More specifically, courts served as an extension of the federal and regional security apparatus as security forces dominated judicial processes and decision making. This was mainly due to the fact that many arrests were related to accusations of being affiliated with the ONLF. As described by previous documentation of the lack of independence of the courts, security officials ignored the release orders of victims accused of supporting the ONLF, while some judges who ordered the release of innocent civilians were

themselves imprisoned³. A complete judicial reform is yet to be implemented in the Somali Region, though some promising steps have been taken in recent times after 2018.

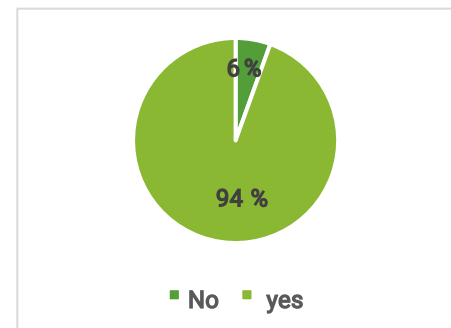
Release from Prison

Victims shared three main reasons for their release. The primary reason reported by 43% of those interviewed, was due to the regime change that took place in the Somali Region and across the country in 2018. The second most common reason given by 33% of the respondents was that they did not know why they were released, meanwhile 22% shared that they were released during the period of mass exonerations initiated by Abdi Iley in 2014. This highlights a lack of due process as described in the previous section, it further suggests that that prisoners often did not know the reason behind their arrests in the first place which stands in direct violation against their constitutionally guaranteed rights. It also signifies the concerning prospect of prisoners' long-term or indefinite imprisonment in the event that a regime change did not take place.

TORTURE AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

The survey revealed that torture and other forms of degrading treatment was a common practice that

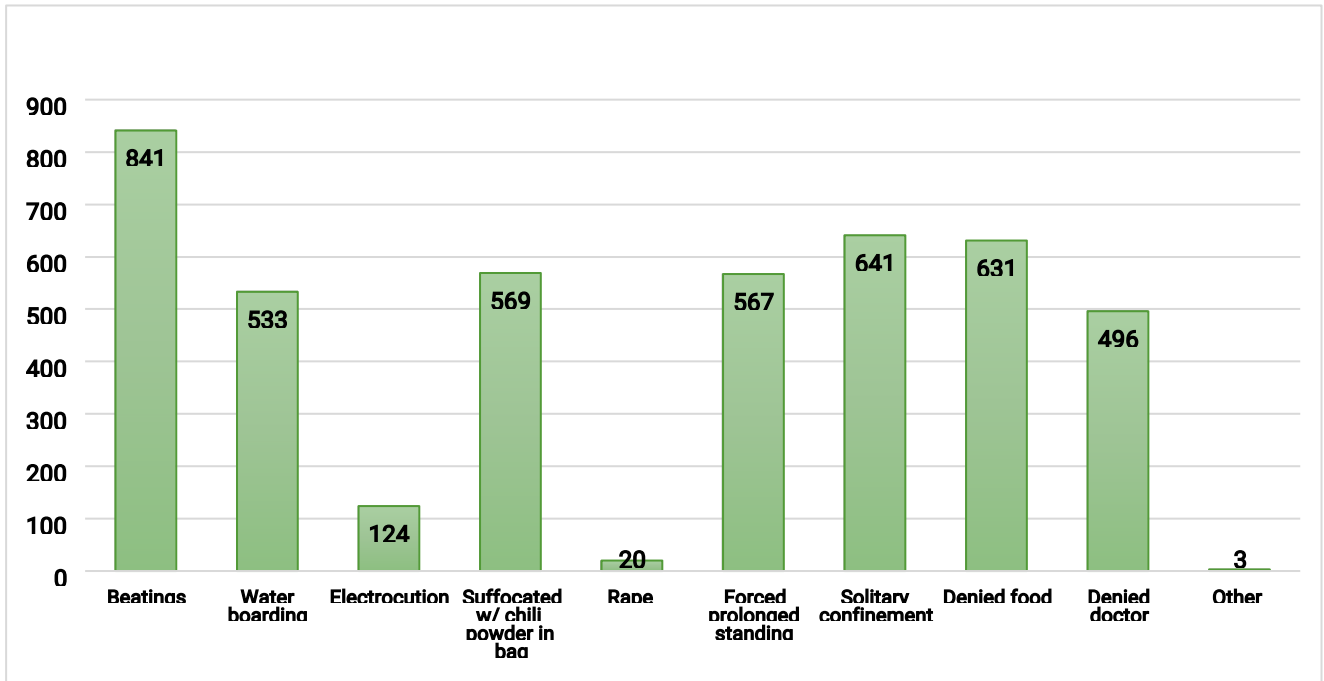
Figure 6. Were you tortured or abused while imprisoned?



³ <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/ethiopia0608/ethiopia0608web.pdf> see pages 9198.

almost all prisoners were subjected to. Out of 890 interviewees, 841 among them which is equivalent to 94%, reported that they were subjected to some kind of torture or abuse while imprisoned. These figures suggest the prevalence of the use of torture at varying degrees under the previous administration in violation against the internationally and nationally recognized rights of prisoners, as well as being in violation against The Convention against Torture (CAT) which Ethiopia is a party to. Data shows that victims endured various types of torture and abuse while imprisoned. The most common types of torture methods include regular beatings, solitary confinement, denial of food, suffocation with plastic bags filled with chili powder, forced prolonged standing in stressful positions, water boarding, denial of doctor and access to medical services, electrocution, rape. This is consistent with the findings of Human Rights Watch's 2018 Jail Ogaden which specified similar findings in addition to other examples of torture such as rolling prisoners in hot ash, tying them in fig position where both feet and arms are tied together behind one's back, sleep deprivation, poor sanitation, group interrogations, various forms of sexual violence such as the genital torture of men among other forms of torture intended to inflict both physical and psychological violence.

Figure 7. Types of tortures victim's endured while in prison.



Considering the severity of the types of abuses prisoners were subjected to, it is expected that the vast majority of the victims sustained some sort of injury

Female victim from Dollo zone described another form of inhuman torture, "my child was killed in front of me and then I was taken to prison."

while in prison. As a result, 78% reported that they suffered various injuries including broken bones, internal and external organ damage as well as

Testimonies of the pain and injury victims currently live with today:

"I have sustained nerve damage to my feet."

"My kidneys hurt."

"I went blind in prison."

persistent mental conditions due to prolonged psychological torture. This is a testament to the long-term impact that torture and imprisonment has had on victims, and the necessity of devising targeted initiatives to remedy the impact of longstanding abuse. As illustrated in the table 2, both male and female victims were subjected to torture during their imprisonment at almost equal rates; 58% males and 42% females which corresponds with the slight variation in the sample size of each group. In addition to this, 95% of female victims were subjected to rape.

Table 2. The number of victims that were subjected to torture or abuse while in prison analyzed by gender.

Were you subjected to torture or abuse while in prison	Female	Male
Yes	354	486
No	19	30

CURRENT NEEDS AND PRIORITIES OF VICTIMS

The surveying team asked victims about their current and most pressings needs in light of their past experiences with imprisonment and other human rights violations. In response, they ranked the priorities as follows; physical health was listed as the first priority of the majority of the victims as 673 people who account for 76% of the total number of participants responded that their most urgent need is to restore their physical health. This

Testimonies of victims’ current needs:

“I live with chronic pain and I am unable to sleep at night. What I need is to become healthy again.”

“Before [I was imprisoned] I had a store but my store was destroyed. Now I have no way to make a livelihood.”

“Because all of my assets were taken from me I am now homeless”.

is representative of the severity of torture that they endured such that the majority have sustained long-term injuries. The second most common priority for victims was housing which 18% of the respondents ranked as their most immediate priority. Livelihood support and mental health was ranked as the third and fourth most common priority for victims. A number of victims also indicated the importance of access to education and family unification as a primary concern. When asked their second most important priority, most of the respondents (60%) reported that housing is their second most immediate priority while physical health and livelihood support were ranked second and third. Mental health, education and family unification were also reported as second most important priorities by a few of the victims. Overall, the data suggests that the most urgent priorities for victims is the need to address physical health needs, housing and livelihood support. As illustrated in the table 3, these priorities are also generally reflected across gender categories.

Table 3. Priorities of victims’ needs ranked from most urgent to least urgent.

Priority 1	Physical health needs
Priority 2	Housing
Priority 3	Livelihood

VIEWS OF VICTIMS ON VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS’ SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS

Regional government

As illustrated below in table 4 victims’ response reveals that their confidence in the regional government for support is low given that a majority of them (43.5%) reported that they were not confident at all. While close to 20% are slightly confident that they will receive the required support from the regional government, only 15% of the respondents felt completely confident that the regional

government will provide the necessary support they require be it physical, financial, or housing related.

There are also 11% who are fairly confident and another 11% who are somewhat confident in attaining the support of the regional government. This suggests a degree of uncertainty among a sizeable number of the victim population, which may be due to several reasons the most significant of which relates to the government's ambiguous approach to the question of victims' support. Such ambiguity is demonstrated by the regional government's rhetorical support for victims and condemnation of perpetrators coupled with a general reluctance to institute specific initiatives designed to address victims' needs.

Local government

Concerning the level of confidence in the local government (zonal and district levels) displayed by victims, 65% of the respondents displayed a complete lack of confidence while 15% of them revealed slight confidence. Only 6.5% reported that they are completely confident in attaining support from the local government. Based on the representative sample, this trend indicates that victims tend to have an even lower level of confidence in attaining support from the local administrations in comparison to the level of confidence placed on the regional government. The reason for this may relate to a shared understanding concerning the capacity of the local administrations in terms of budgets, but also in terms of having a mandate to introduce policies tailored towards victim support which lies in the hands of the regional government. In addition, there is an overwhelming sense among victims that reforms have not trickled down to local administrative zones where entrenched discriminatory attitudes towards formally banned political groups still persist.

Civil society

The level of confidence placed on the support of civil society organizations (CSOs) is in stark contrast to that of the various administrative levels of the government. As illustrated in table 4, 56% of victims confirmed that they are completely

confident in the support of CSOs, whereas 26.5% are fairly confident in CSOs. This equates to a significant degree of consensus, equivalent to 82.5% among victims, in their general confidence and expectations of support from CSOs.

This may be due to an understanding that CSOs practice a high level of accountability and transparency compared to government institutions. It also sends a strong signal to donors and any other partners interested in supporting victims' initiatives encouraging them to collaborate with victims' groups and CSOs.

Elders and religious leaders

The survey revealed an interesting trend in the level of confidence that victims have in the prospect of support from community leaders and elders. In traditional Somali society, the primary role of elders is to manage conflict, settle disputes, and provide a leadership role in times of challenges faced by their community. The present-day challenge of individual and collective trauma, and the necessity of community healing initiatives spearheaded by community leaders cannot be understated. However, more than 50% of the respondents reported that they are not completely confident in the elders whereas 20% are slightly confident. Only 13% have complete confidence in the support of elders and community leaders. There are a number of possible explanations for this, the first relates to the fact that community networks lack institutional support and resources to carry out meaningful work in the area of victim support. Secondly, previous authoritarian governing systems in Ethiopia have eroded traditional structures such as the salient role of elders and community leaders making their roles redundant as a method of control and in attempt to undercut the social fabric of society.

Similar to the role of traditional elders in Somali society, religious leaders are also considered as honorable figures that serve important functions. However, the survey results reveal a discrepancy between the significant position of religious leaders and the lack of confidence victims have in gaining their potential support. Most respondents, constituting 65% are not confident in religious leaders at all, 13.5% have slight confidence in them, whereas only 8% reported that they have

complete confidence in religious leaders.

This trend is indicative of the evolving roles of traditional and religious institutions who are increasingly involved in government affairs and political processes. This is a departure away from their previous status as independent and non-partisan institutions. At present, their loyalty to the community vis a vis the government may be compromised or put in question. Beyond this apparent distrust, traditional and religious institutions lack the institutional capacity, mandate, and resources to meaningfully support the most critical needs of victims described earlier.

Table 4. Views of victims on which institutions they have confidence in best supporting victim needs by percentage.

Institution	Completely confident	Fairly confident	Somewhat confident	Slightly confident	Not confident at all
Civil Society	56%	26.5%	3%	4%	10.5%
Regional Government	15%	11%	43.5%	19.5%	11%
Local Government	6.5%	7%	65%	15%	6.5%
Elders	13%	10%	52.5%	20%	4.5%
Religious leaders	8%	8.5%	65%	13.5%	5%

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This report is based on a survey conducted with both male (58%) and female (68%) victims, a majority (68%) of whom were born between 1981- 2000 and therefore in their most productive age. The findings of the survey revealed that the overwhelming reason for the arrest of the sampled victims was their suspected affiliation with ONLF; 85% were arrested on those grounds whereas 14% were arrested due to suspicion related to their family member’s affiliation with the ONLF.

Most of the respondents were arrested once, however, the probability of facing arrest multiple times was also high. The survey further revealed that most prisoners were arrested between 2006-2015 and released in 2014/2015 or 2018 in response to the prevailing political situations at the time such as mass exonerations in the face of political pressure (2014/2015) and regime change (2018). More than 30% of respondents were sentenced to over 20 years of imprisonment, while 56% were arrested along with their family members signifying the institutionalized practice of reprisals and collective punishment. In addition, 34% reported that they never had the opportunity to appear in court, while many also had important resources such as livestock, cash, businesses, houses, land, and gold confiscated by security forces.

Consistent with previous human rights documentation in the Somali Region, 94% of respondents confessed being subjected to torture and other abuses such as beatings, solitary confinement, denial of food, suffocation with bags filled with chili powder, forced prolonged standing, water boarding, denial of doctor/medical services, electrocution, and sexual abuse. As a result of such cruel torture intended to inflict maximum pain, 78% of the victims sustained injuries during their stay in the prison.

Based on injuries sustained from suffering prolonged abuses, victims require a number of immediate services to restore their lives and remedy the impact of longstanding physical, psychological and economic abuses. Priorities include accessing support for physical health, housing, livelihood recovery, mental health, education, and family unification. Victims place the highest degree of trust in the role of civil society organizations in addressing these needs with little expectation of government support. Such a crucial finding is a call towards all government institutions to re-build trust with victim communities by engaging with them, initiating new strategies for rebuilding their lives, and actively collaborating with victim groups on such critical work.

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