

## **Benishangul-Gumuz region: Protection of civilians is the primary duty of the government**

December 24, 2020 | Press Release

Armed group shot at residents, set fire to homes, killing at least 100 people

In Benishangul-Gumuz Region's Metekel Zone, an armed group shot at residents and set fire to their homes as they lay asleep, killing at least 100 people. The attack in Bulen Woreda's Bekuji Kebele is a sign of a severe decline of human rights protections in the region, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said.

EHRC verified the attacks by speaking with victims and other sources in Bekuji Kebele, an area home to ethnic Amharas, Oromos, and Shinashas, and 90 kilometres away from Bulen Woreda's capital, also called Bulen. EHRC has learned that Bekuji Kebele does not have a local police or security force.

The commission's team visited 36 victims who were receiving treatment at Bulen Hospital, the majority for gunshot wounds and others for injuries sustained from arrow attacks. In addition to the loss of life, physical injury and property loss, crops and harvests were burned and destroyed. One witness described seeing at least 18 piles of harvested crops on fire. In related incidents, the commission has also obtained testimonies of houses being burned in Benishangul-Gumuz's Chelenko and Doshe Woredas. In Dibate Woreda's Donben Kebele, residents have been fleeing their homes since noon on December 23, 2020 fearing the spread of the attacks.

EHRC also understands that the attacks followed the departure from the area on December 22, 2020, of National Defense Forces contingents previously positioned in the surroundings to restore calm to allegedly "accompany one federal and two regional officials" on their official mission. According to survivors, the attacks began in the early hours, 4:00 am, and carried on until midday.

Survivors also believe that the majority of the victims were ethnic Shinashas. While previous incidents involved assailants staging their attacks from "forests and bushes", victims told EHRC they were able to recognize those involved in the December 23 attack "by name and sight". EHRC has repeatedly called for stronger collaboration between the federal and regional governments and a greater focus into the recurring nature of the attacks. Unfortunately, the attacks have only increased in scope and frequency.

Authorities should make provision of medical and humanitarian assistance to victims and those displaced by the December 23 attacks a priority and promptly start investigations to bring the perpetrators to account, both for failure to protect and aggravation of the attacks. EHRC also calls for an immediate strengthening of the security structure and forces in the region in a manner that guarantees the peace and security of residents.

Location Benishangul-Gumuz

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