

News: Dozens of civilians killed in sustained Konso zone violence, more than 94, 000 displaced

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Villages located in various localities of Konso zone in SNNPRS are often targeted. Picture: provided by eye witnesses

By Mahlet Fasil @MahletFasil

Addis Abeba, November 23/2020 – Dozens of civilians were killed and more than 94, 000 displaced from various localities in the Konso Zone of Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's regional state (SNNPRS) in sustained attacks by armed men.

For the past week, *Addis Standard* has been following the troubling reports closely **after receiving several calls from residents** trapped in the middle of the ongoing attacks especially in Megala-Digaya kebele, in Garcha Kebele, in Turo village of Aylotta Dokatu Kebele of Konso zone as well as in Gato Kebele & in Derashe zone. Similar violence is also reported in various localities located in Segen Area People's Zone.

The Segen Area People's Zone underwent a restructuring in November 2018, after nearly four years of protest by Konso community, resulting in the split of the Konso zone from Segen Area People's Zone, where Konso wereda, along with Derashe, Amaro, and Burji made up the Segen Area People Zone since 2011.

There has been intermittent violence since then, which are attributed largely to armed groups who opposed the decision of splitting the Konso zone, residents who spoke to *Addis Standard* say. Two years after the restructuring of the zone, violence keeps on ravaging the area.

The latest round of violence involves the Konso zone and Ale woreda and was ignited by a boundary dispute between individuals since July 2020. "We didn't think a dispute between two people would proceed to engulfing the whole area" one eye witness from Konso zone said, adding "The attacks that started with assaulting us with sticks and stones have now converted into shooting at us with heavy arms."

Several residents who reached out at *Addis Standard* spoke of days-long attacks on the members of the Konso community by armed groups. The security vacuum created as a result of the federal forces evacuating the area in recent weeks has contributed in intensifying the attacks. *Addis Standard* has also received several pictures of victims and burned villages that need to be verified. These heavily armed groups have inundated the regional and federal security forces to the point of making them seek protection in the Gumayde woreda administration compound as stated in witness accounts.

According to Kebede Kasussa, head of the Konso zone agriculture and natural resources bureau, the latest number of displaced civilians stood at 94, 586 and was increasing by the day

Hassen Welalo, head of the peace and security bureau of the Konso zone, confirmed that the attacks by armed men have been going on for over 5 months. According to him since then the areas being targeted by armed men have increased to cover several villages and have resulted in the death so far of around 70 people including one member of the national defense forces, one regional special police force and one from the federal police.

According to Kebede Kasussa, head of the Konso zone agriculture and natural resources bureau, the latest number of displaced civilians stood at 94, 586 and was increasing by the day. Hassen Wellalo on his part says nearly 1000 houses were burned in Ariba Gelala, Kalanigo, Garicha, Kebeles, Osiko woreda and seven villages in Gelabo and Fuchicha woredas.

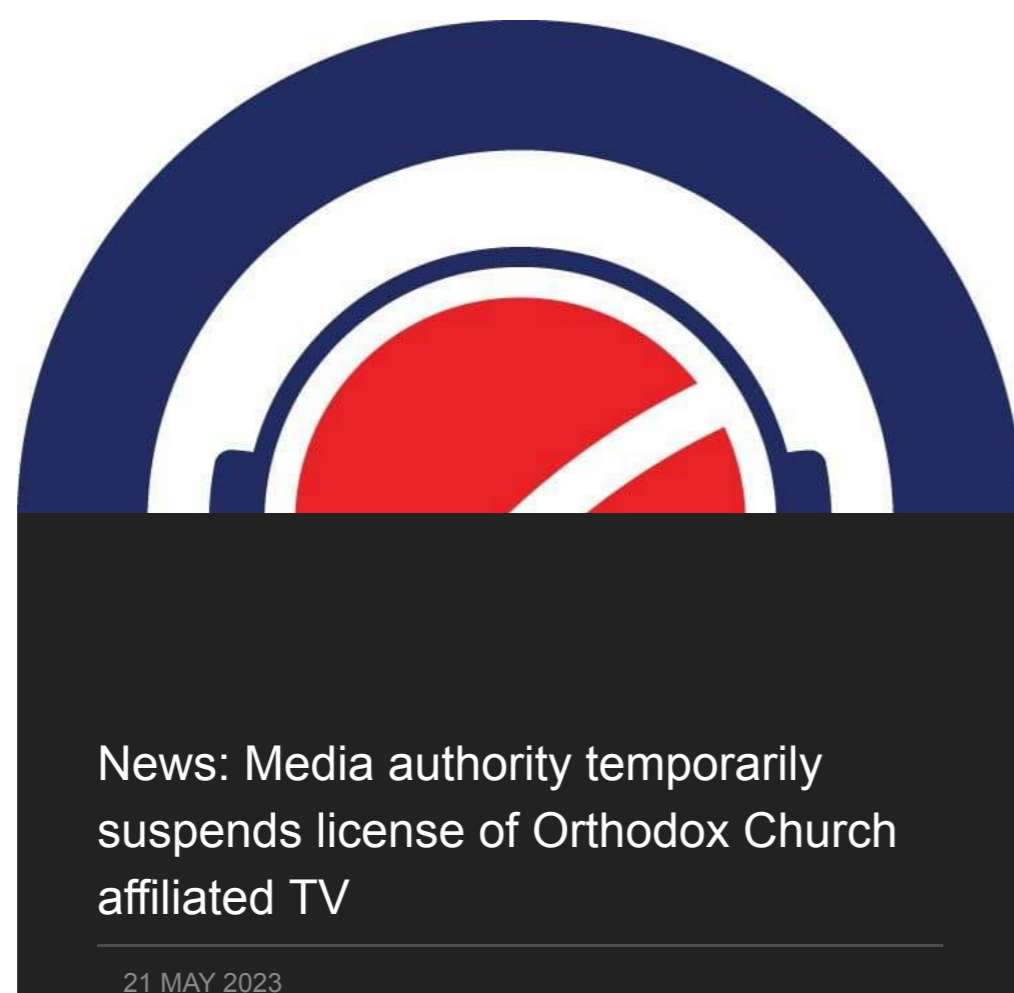
No arrests have been made in direct connection to the attacks, Hassan said, further explaining that the number of federal and special police forces deployed was disproportionately lower than the wide range of the areas where the attacks are taking place. Hassan called upon the government to step up its efforts to rescue the people of Konso from additional attacks.

On the other hand, the head of the Peace and Security Bureau of the SNNPRS Alemayehu Bawde **indicated** that former members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and members of the regional regional police force who defected their unites were behind the violence. According to him the members of the ENDF include those who were relieved of their duties two years ago for **descending upon Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's palace**. He also said some 14 political leaders and Woreda administrators have been arrested so far in connection with the violence.

Ale Special Woreda on its part stated the presence of repeated violence claiming the lives of civilians and causing property destruction in areas bordering Konso and Ale, and said authorities from both Woredas were working after establishing a joint task force to identify the root causes of the problems, according to the head of the joint task force Tadelie W/Michael. Three Woreda officials from each Woredas affected by the violence were drawn to coordinate security together with regional security forces in order to bring the perpetrators to face justice. **AS**

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