Massacres of Orthodox Christians in Arsi Zone, Oromia, Ethiopia (20 and 24 October 2026)

Prepared 2 November 2026. Facts are drawn from the published sources cited in each item; unverified matters are identified as such.

1. Case Summary and Facts

- The Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church reported 14 people killed on 20 October 2026 in Gora Silingo, Angada Kebele, Merti district, and 46 killed on 24 October in the villages of Tereta, Chole and Birbo, Shirka district, both in Arsi Zone, Oromia (Associated Press; Al Jazeera).
- The church reported more than 20 people seriously injured and 20 homes burned, and described the killings as "brutal and merciless massacres" (AP). It said the attacks violated constitutional protections for life and religious freedom (Al Jazeera).
- Eyewitnesses told BBC Amharic that five of the dead were children. A resident said: "They surrounded us from all four directions" (BBC).
- The Centre for Information Resilience verified and geolocated imagery of a mass burial at St Rufael's Orthodox Church in Chole containing 33 bodies. CIR assessed a "realistic possibility" that victims were targeted for their Christian identity but could not verify the motive or the perpetrators, and flagged recycled and AI generated imagery circulating online (CIR).
- No group has claimed responsibility. A local official blamed the Alliance for Survival coalition, which includes the Oromo Liberation Army; the OLA has denied previous attacks on civilians (BBC). The Oromia regional government pledged to pursue those responsible. Responsibility has not been independently established; the International Council for Human Rights and Religious Freedom called for an independent investigation on 31 October (ICHRRF).
- The Ethiopian Human Rights Council reported in July 2026 that 458 people were killed in attacks in the area over four years. The church says repeated warnings to authorities produced "no solution" (BBC). Attacks on Muslims in the area have also been documented.
- Context: Open Doors World Watch List 2026 ranks Ethiopia 36th. The Global Christian Relief 2026 Red List ranks Ethiopia third for killings of Christians (177) and fourth for assaults and abductions (183).

2. Human Rights Law Being Violated

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 3 (right to life, liberty and security of person) and Article 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion).
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Ethiopia: Article 6 (right to life; read with Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 36 on the duty of due diligence against private actors and armed groups), Article 18 (freedom to manifest religion), Article 26 (equal protection), and Article 2(3) (effective remedy).

- 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (GA res. 36/55): Article 2 (no discrimination on grounds of religion) and Article 4 (effective measures to prevent religious discrimination).
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights: Article 4 (inviolability of the human being and right to life) and Article 8 (freedom of conscience and free practice of religion).
- Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995): Article 15 (right to life) and Article 27 (freedom of religion, belief and opinion).
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), to which Ethiopia is a party: Article I (duty to prevent and punish) and Article II (killing members of a religious group with intent to destroy it, in whole or in part, as such). Potentially relevant only if specific intent is established; no such finding has been made.

3. Current UN Instruments and Mechanisms

- UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (mandate created in 1986): communications to the government and public statements.
- UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide: early warning analysis under the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes.
- Human Rights Council: may create a commission of inquiry or fact-finding mission; Universal Periodic Review of Ethiopia.
- General Assembly resolution 73/296 (International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, 22 August).
- Security Council: the only body able to order enforcement measures under Chapter VII or refer the situation to the International Criminal Court; Ethiopia is not a party to the Rome Statute.
- Limitation: Charter Article 2(7) shields matters essentially within domestic jurisdiction, and none of the mechanisms above can compel protection or an independent investigation without consent or Security Council action.

4. How Joseph Bonner's Draft Resolution Would Help

Title as found: “Strengthening of the United Nations system: UN 2.0 and Supranational Integration”

Working paper for the General Assembly's eighty-first session, dated 23 March 2026, submitted by the Human Rights Delegation/GHRTF (author: Joseph Bonner). The paper does not refer to religion, religious freedom or any specific country. Its provisions are general, binding governance mechanisms that could be applied to situations such as this one if they were adopted and the situation were declared a global emergency.

Where a state's own security forces fail to stop repeated massacres in the same area, the draft would provide binding tools rather than recommendations:

- Operative clause 2: initiation of the Article 109 Charter Review process to establish a Supranational Oversight Council "with the power to issue mandatory directives that override national domestic jurisdiction in matters of global security."

- Next steps paragraph 4: Supranational Oversight Council mandates "legally binding on all Member States, notwithstanding the provisions of Article 2, paragraph 7, for the duration of a declared global emergency."
- Next steps paragraph 2: a "High-Level Panel on Supranational Oversight" to draft the legal bylaws for a Unified Global Response Force and "a binding legislative framework."
- Operative clause 3: a Unified Command Protocol (UCP) that "integrates national enforcement capabilities under a centralized UN strategic framework."
- Conclusion, preamble: the "Triple-C" threats (Climate catastrophe, Conflict escalation, and economic Collapse) "require a unified legal response that transcends traditional national domestic jurisdiction."
- Next steps paragraph 5: a Mandatory Reversion Clause returning all delegated powers to national sovereign control upon formal de-escalation, as verified by the General Assembly.

Application: a Supranational Oversight Council could mandate civilian protection and an independent investigation in Arsi Zone, and a Unified Global Response Force could act where national forces have not. The draft's binding powers apply only in a declared global emergency, so whether a sustained killing campaign against a religious community meets that threshold would need to be settled in the High-Level Panel's bylaws.

Status: the draft resolution did not advance. Joseph Bonner intends to bring it back before world leaders next year and is currently seeking Member State sponsors.

5. GHRTF Recommendations

1. Call on the Government of Ethiopia to open a prompt, independent and transparent investigation into the 20 and 24 October killings, publish its findings, and prosecute those responsible in fair trials, consistent with ICCPR Articles 2(3) and 6.
2. Urge the Human Rights Council to mandate an independent fact-finding mission on violence against civilians, including religious communities, in Arsi Zone and wider Oromia.
3. Ask the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to assess the four year pattern of killings in the area, including the 458 deaths reported by the Ethiopian Human Rights Council.
4. Press Ethiopian federal and regional authorities to deploy protection to at risk villages and churches in Merti and Shirka districts, and to provide relief, medical care and safe return for displaced families.
5. Seek Member State sponsors for the draft resolution "Strengthening of the United Nations system: UN 2.0 and Supranational Integration" so that its High-Level Panel can define when mass atrocities against a religious community trigger binding international protection.