

Table of Contents

- [*Orthodox Synod says agreement to resolve schism breached as breakaway group expresses dissent*](#)
 - [*Ethiopia Orthodox Church split: Social media restricted*](#)
-

Orthodox Synod says agreement to resolve schism breached as breakaway group expresses dissent

[Addis Standard](#) (18.02.2023) - The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) Holy Synod in Addis Abeba said that the [agreement to resolve the schism](#) that led to unrest in the country over the past weeks has been breached by the breakaway group two days after it was reached.

Abune Abreham, general manager of the Holy Synod said in [a statement on](#) Friday that the three Archbishops who according to the agreement reached on Wednesday were to return to their former dioceses and titles violated the agreement by addressing the media using a name "the new synod".

The three Archbishops and 25 episcopate ordained by them in [a presser](#) subsequent to the agreement said on Friday that they accept the agreement reached in its entirety but expressed dissent on the agreement point which says the episcopate ordained by the three archbishops would return to their former ranks.

They said revoking the anointment which was made according to the church's canon is against the canon itself and that the anointment should be upheld.

Abune Abreham said that "despite knowing that the episcopate anointment was annulled by the agreement, they violated the agreement by wearing the robe of sanctity and those who were part of the agreement altogether violated the canon again".

On the Wednesday's agreement, which was reached in the absence of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, it was decided that the three archbishops, Abune Sawiros, Abune Eostatheos and Abune Zena Markos, would return to their former dioceses and titles, and that the episcopate ordained by them would also return to their former ranks on the account that those who meet the church's laws and regulations will be reappointed by the Holy Synod.

The two groups had also reached a consensus to work together on the issues of language and diversity within the church's services which led to the schism in the first place.

Background

On 26 January the principal Holy Synod of the EOTC [excommunicated](#) three breakaway Archbishops and 25 appointee episcopate accusing them of involving in "illegal anointment" without the knowledge of the church. On Saturday 28 January, the three archbishops and 25 episcopate also [excommunicated 12 Archbishops](#) of EOTC Holy Synod members in a countermeasure, followed by [dispatching over the weekend](#), bishops to their assigned dioceses.

The event that led to what has now potentially become a split of the EOTC happened at the [Haro Beale Wold Church](#) in Woliso city of the South-West Shoa zone in Oromia

Regional State, on 22 January, where His Holiness Abune Sawiros (PhD), Archbishop of South West Shoa Diocese, together with two other Archbishops, appointed 26 bishops: 17 bishops for dioceses located in the Oromia region, and nine bishops for dioceses outside Oromia without the involvement of the Holy Synod, creating widespread shock and anger among many of the church's followers.

His Holiness Abune Sawiros explained the decision to appoint the 26 episcopate was made to resolve long lasting problems within the church for failing to serve believers in their native languages and detached of their culture, which resulted in loss of millions of believers over the past years particularly in Oromia and Southern region.

Following Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's remarks in which he [weighed in with a call for dialogue](#) and remarked on the schism saying that it was "possible to resolve it without suppressing people's right and demand to use one's own language, the tensions between the Holy Synod in Addis Abeba and the government were heightened.

The Holy Synod [slammed the PM's remarks](#), and accused the government of direct involvement in the crisis and called on faithfuls to wear black for three days in protest of the government's position.

On 04 February, [clashes lash between followers](#) of Orthodox Christianity and the local police in West Arsi zone, Shashemene city of the Oromia Region "claimed the lives of many people." The clashes erupted at St. Michael Church during a reception ceremony for members clergy appointed by the new "Holy Synod of Oromia and Nations and Nationalities."

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said in [a report](#) that eight people were killed following "excessive use of force" by government security forces during the clashes.

A nationwide protest rally which was planned for 12 February was called off after church leaders discussed with the PM on 11 Saturday leading to the agreement that was reached on Wednesday and now in shambles.

Photo: Abune Abraham. Photo: Screenshot/AS

Ethiopia Orthodox Church split: Social media restricted

By Lucy Fleming

BBC (11.02.2023) - <https://bbc.in/3K8mNr2> - Ethiopia has restricted social media and messaging platforms ahead of rival planned rallies following a split in the popular Orthodox Church.

The row has caused deadly violence and began last month when some clerics accused the main church of ethnic discrimination, which it denies.

The authorities banned protests by both sides due to take place on Sunday.

Some supporters of the main church angrily accuse the authorities of backing the breakaway group.

They had vowed online to defy the ban and go ahead with their rally as a show of strength for the Orthodox Church, which is one of the oldest in sub-Saharan Africa and one of the few in the region to exist before the arrival of European missionaries.

There are fears of a complete internet shutdown in the coming days. It is a tactic commonly used in the country - which has a population of 115 million - though rarely in the capital, Addis Ababa.

Some areas of the northern region of Tigray, where a brutal two-year conflict came to an end in November after a peace deal brokered by the African Union (AU), remain without access to the internet.

- [**BBC Africa Live: Updates from the continent**](#)
- [**Why Ethiopia's 'alphabet generation' feel betrayed**](#)

Netblocks, an organisation that monitors internet access, said the current restrictions are affecting Facebook, Messenger, Telegram and TikTok.

Those with virtual private network (VPN) software can get on to those sites, but a total shutdown would prevent that.

London-based VPN research firm TOP10VPN said demand for VPNs in Ethiopia skyrocketed by 1,430% on Friday.

The authorities have also closed schools on Friday as tension mounts in the deeply religious society - and there are concerns the situation may escalate further.

The authorities are also preparing for the annual AU summit, which is due to be held next week.

It will be the organisation's first meeting since the Tigray deal was signed and the government will be anxious to avoid unrest in Addis Ababa, which is where the AU's headquarters is based.

What is behind the split?

Three archbishops from Oromia, which surrounds Addis Ababa and is the country's most populous region, accused the leadership of the main church of discrimination and a lack of diversity.

They say for too long the Orthodox Church has been dominated culturally by other ethnic groups. Amharic, for example, is the working language of the country, and the patriarch, its influential leader, is an ethnic Tigrayan.

The dissenting clerics said services should be held in the Oromo language - and though the main church says this happens, they say not nearly enough.

The archbishops, who have been excommunicated after setting up a breakaway synod, say they have a great deal of support in Oromia and had organised a counter rally in Addis Ababa.

But in a blow for the dissenters, a court placed an injunction on them on Friday, banning them and the clergy they have recently appointed from entering churches belonging to the Orthodox Church.

The fallout may also have a political element.

Some analysts say the patriarch, Abune Mathias, has not been on good terms with the authorities since speaking out about the war in Tigray, [controversially saying that a genocide was being committed there](#).

Its planned rally was to show off the strength of its support. It was angered after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed instructed his cabinet ministers to keep out of the matter, feeling the government should take its side.

Following the rally ban and the social media restrictions, it has been announced that Mr Abiy is meeting the patriarch, so tensions may ease over the next few days.

The state-linked Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has also stepped into the fray, releasing a statement on Friday accusing the security forces of using excessive force against followers of the main church.

It refers to extrajudicial killings, beatings, harassment and arbitrary arrests and says eight people were killed during religious clashes last Saturday in Shashamane, a town in Oromia.

More reading

[Le Monde](#)

Photo: Orthodox Christians constitute 43% of the population, making them Ethiopia's largest and most influential religious group – AFP
