Years of Abuse in Eastern Ethiopia Need Probe, Rights Group Says

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Ethiopia’s government must commit to a full investigation into years of rights abuses and violations of the laws of war in the eastern Somali region, Human Rights Watch said, after the regional president was deposed.

The Liyu Police force, which was under ex-President Abdi Mohamoud Omar’s control, has enacted an abusive counter-insurgency campaign over the past decade and been implicated in extrajudicial killings, torture and rape, the New York-based rights group [said Monday](https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/20/ethiopia-probe-years-abuse-somali-region). In a 2008 report, Human Rights Watch accused both Ethiopian security forces and insurgents of war crimes in the region.

“To break with the past, Ethiopia’s government needs to ensure justice for more than a decade of horrific abuses in the Somali region,” Maria Burnett, East and Horn of Africa director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement. Ethiopia’s new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, must ensure accountability for serious rights violations as he introduces wide-ranging reforms, she said.

The Somali region, site of sizable natural gas reserves as well as a more than 30-year low-level insurgency, has seen further political upheaval this month. The president was removed by federal forces on Aug. 6 after violence that followed their deployment around the parliament in the regional capital, Jigjiga. Liyu police and loyalist youth attacked residents and burned property in the city, according to Human Rights Watch.

Ethiopian Information Minister Ahmed Shide, who succeeded Abdi as chairman of the regional Ethiopian People’s Somali Democratic Party, didn’t respond to two calls and two text messages seeking comment on Human Rights Watch’s statement.