

## Significance

One of EHRC's key duties as a national human rights institution is to "educate the public, using the mass media and other means, to enhance its tradition of respect for and demand for enforcement of rights upon acquiring sufficient awareness regarding human rights."

Human rights work is a multifaceted endeavor that impacts every individual and aspect of daily life and therefore requires everyone's participation, support, and contribution. It is why it is crucial for everyone to be aware of their rights and obligations and to understand their role in realizing EHRC's vision of instilling "A human rights culture in Ethiopia".

Its capacity to capture minds, its accessibility, and its delivery of complex issues simply and creatively make art a highly effective education tool. As the EHRC Chief Commissioner noted at the opening of the second annual Human Rights Film Festival, "Art reminds us to look inward, calls us to recall our unity in our humanity, and inspires us to respect and love one another. But human rights film festivals and other similar platforms also serve to remind artists and non-artists to be deliberate about the messages conveyed. They also play a role in inspiring people and fostering collaboration towards a shared goal." It is therefore natural and inevitable that human rights institutions seek to harness the power of art and develop a relationship with the arts community through film festivals and similar platforms.



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## Brief Description

Since 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has organized an annual human rights film festival to mark International Human Rights Day on December 10. By showcasing a diverse range of films, including short and full-length features, documentaries, and fictional works, exploring various human rights issues affecting everyone's daily lives, the festival serves as a networking, discussion, and experience-sharing platform for human rights practitioners and arts professionals. The event is made possible through the collaboration of film and art experts and provides a platform for audiences to engage with filmmakers, actors, and other industry professionals. It is also an opportunity for the Commission's partner organizations and human rights advocates to engage with the arts community.

The film festival is hosted in cinemas or similar venues across various cities in Ethiopia. It is attended by professionals from diverse fields, civic society organizations, higher education and high school students, and other invited guests. However, since it is organized to mark Human Rights Day, the various films showcased and the discussions that take place afterward with the filmmakers, as well as the other visibility and awareness-creating materials around the festival, are designed around the Human Rights Day theme of the year and the national human rights priorities. As such, the festival is designed to foster discussion about human rights among participants, experts, and audiences in a unique and impactful platform away from more conventional events.

## Evolution

The first Human Rights Film Festival organized in 2021 was held in Adama, Addis Ababa, and Hawassa cities and showcased around eight documentaries and feature films in two local languages. The second one reached two additional cities—Bahir Dar and Jigjiga—and a more diverse range of films, adding two more local languages as well. In addition to the screening, the two festivals featured presentations by more than 20 filmmakers and experts and the participation of 10 of EHRC's partner institutions.

In addition, the 2021 and 2022 Human Rights Film Festivals also attracted a diverse range of attendees, including professionals and students in the film and arts industries, representatives from governmental and non-governmental institutions working on human rights, members of civil society organizations, media outlets, elders, and invited guests. Through the support of partner organizations and dissemination across EHRC's online platforms and media outlets, these events made human rights and related issues accessible to thousands of individuals.

Our commitment to making the festival progressively more and more accessible will continue as we strive to translate films produced in more local languages, including sign language, and reach a greater number of cities in Ethiopia. In collaboration with partners, EHRC's annual Human Rights Film Festival will continue to expand in terms of content, accessibility, and participation, combining the art of filmmaking with human rights education and awareness-raising.



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## Content and Form

Content and form Some of the films featured in 2021 and 2022 include some that were produced with the financial support of EHRC and its partners, while others were made available by the filmmakers for the festival:

### Human Rights in Ethiopian Films:

- Documentary
- Producer: Surafel Tefera
- Explores how different sections of society express human rights, with a particular emphasis on how these rights are portrayed in Amharic language films.

### The Suspect:

- Producer: Dawit Tesfaye
- This short film depicts the treatment of individuals who have been arrested and detained on suspicion of a crime in Ethiopia.

### Displacement:

- Documentary
- Producer: Zeleman Productions
- The film focuses on the lives of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who were displaced from different regions due to conflict and are currently living in a shelter near Bahir Dar city in the Amhara region.

### Kologi:

- Documentary
- Produced by Meaza Film Productions
- Portrays the daily struggles faced by individuals who have experienced prolonged internal displacement in the Kologi refugee camp, which is located in the Somali region.

**Quragaye.** Produced by writer and director Dr. Moges Tafese: Quragaye is a short film that offers a unique glimpse into the justice system in Ethiopia at the turn of the 20th century.

**Sewenetua/Her Body:** Sewenetua/Her Body is the story of a woman who sets out to work in the Middle East and chronicles her life and struggles as she maintains her hope, humanity, and compassion for others. Based on a true story and directed by Sewemehon Yisemaw (Somic), this film offers an intimate and emotional look at the experiences of migrant workers and their ongoing fight for dignity and respect.

**Hade Sinke:** Hade Milkj is known as the “Mother of Equality, Opportunity, and Justice” in the Oromo community. They play a crucial role in promoting peace and reconciliation during times of social and political crises, alongside Aba Geddas. Hade Sinke, a film produced by Fistum Zegaye, sheds light on the often-overlooked members of the justice system and women human rights defenders.

**Adibana:** Directed by Fanta Sintayehu, this culturally oriented film offers a captivating look at a local traditional betrothal ceremony in Guji Oromo culture, whereby women are the ones asking for the men’s hand in marriage.

**Kisut:** Kisut, a film directed by Abe Bekele, tells the story of a heroic woman and explores the nature of heroism and the critical role of women in times of crisis.

**Yaletesefu Kedadoch/Unsewn Holes:** A film produced by Tewodros Worku, depicts the challenges faced by people with disabilities in accessing infrastructure and public services. The film highlights that these individuals are often unable to use these facilities because the infrastructure itself is not designed to accommodate them.

Other issues covered by films screened at these two rounds of festivals include the rights of women and children, human rights violations during human trafficking and migration, disability, and the treatment of prisoners and pretrial detainees. Following each screening, a panel of EHRC experts and other professionals led the audience in a short session of discussion and debate about the films and the topics covered.

## Partner Organizations

Although EHRC coordinates and organizes the annual Human Rights Film Festival, the event is made possible only thanks to the participation of numerous art professionals who produce, curate, and evaluate the films. These experts also contribute their insights and perspectives to the discussions that take place during the festival. The Commission’s own national and international partners who participate through funding and other forms of technical support are also invaluable to the success of the festival. The festival, in addition to being a platform for coordination, also offers a unique visibility opportunity for the partners.

Some of these partners include the East African Regional Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR-EHRO) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations Union (EHR OU) and its five members, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Embassies of Switzerland, Norway, England, Germany, and Denmark, Irish Aid, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

Government and non-government institutions, along with local art professionals in the cities where the film festival is held, also contribute immensely.

## Continuity

The significance of annual human rights film festivals in bringing people together to address current and pressing issues is only possible with continuous improvement in content, form, and overall organization. EHRC’s annual Human Rights Film Festival, which is a common forum for the arts and human rights communities, relies on cooperation from a range of organizations involved in its various processes. These partners contribute by coordinating the event, presenting new ideas to ensure its success, promoting the festival, and allowing their films to be screened on the platform. This collaborative approach helps to ensure that the event is able to deliver a high-quality and engaging experience for all participants and audiences. The event will continue to strive to increase the range of human rights issues covered and its geographic and language accessibility. It will seek out films that are thought-provoking and shed light on important human rights issues. EHRC is also committed to expanding the types of art forms showcased at the Human Rights Film Festival and to continually provide high-quality content.



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