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Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Head of state: **Mulatu Teshome Wirtu**

Head of government: **Hailemariam Desalegn**

Freedom of expression continued to be subject to serious restrictions. The government was hostile to suggestions of dissent, and often made pre-emptive arrests to prevent dissent from manifesting. Independent media publications were subject to further attack. Peaceful protesters, journalists, and members of opposition political parties were arbitrarily arrested. The Charities and Societies Proclamation continued to obstruct the work of human rights organizations. Arbitrary detention and torture and other ill-treatment were widespread, often used as part of a system for silencing actual or suspected dissent.

Background

Economic growth continued apace, along with significant foreign investment including in the agriculture, construction and manufacturing sectors, large-scale development projects such as hydroelectric dam building and plantations, and widespread land-leasing, often to foreign companies.

The government used multiple channels and methods to enforce political control on the population, including politicizing access to job and education opportunities and development assistance, and high levels of physical and technological surveillance.

The politicization of the investigative branch of the police and of the judiciary meant that it was not possible to receive a fair hearing in politically motivated trials.

Federal and regional security services were responsible for violations throughout the country, including arbitrary arrests, the use of excessive force, torture and extrajudicial executions. They operated with near-total impunity.

Armed opposition groups remained in several parts of the country or in neighbouring countries, although in most cases with small numbers of fighters and low levels of activity.

Access to some parts of the Somali region continued to be severely restricted. There were continuing reports of serious violations of human rights, including arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial executions. There were also multiple allegations of the rape of women and girls by members of the security services.

Excessive use of force – extrajudicial executions

In April and May, protests took place across Oromia region against a proposed "Integrated Master Plan" to expand the capital Addis Ababa into Oromia regional territory. The government said the plan would bring services to remote areas, but many Oromo people feared it would damage the interests of Oromo farmers and lead to large-scale displacement.

Security services, comprising federal police and military special forces, responded with excessive force, firing live ammunition at protesters in Ambo and Guder towns and Wallega and Madawalabu universities, resulting in the deaths of at least 30 people, including children. Hundreds of people were beaten by security service agents during and after the protests, including protesters, bystanders, and parents of protesters for failing to "control" their children, resulting in scores of injuries.

Thousands of people were arbitrarily arrested. Large numbers were detained without charge for several months, and some were held incommunicado. Hundreds were held in unofficial places of detention, including Senkele police training camp. Some detainees were transferred to Maikelawi federal police detention centre in Addis Ababa. Over 100 people continued to be detained in Kelem Wallega, Jimma and Ambo by security service agents after courts ordered their release on bail or unconditionally.

Many of those arrested were released after varying detention periods, between May and October, but others were denied bail, or remained in detention without charge. Others, including students and members of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) opposition political party, were prosecuted and convicted in rapid trials on various charges relating to the protests.

Freedom of expression, arbitrary arrests and detentions

2014 saw another onslaught on freedom of expression and suggestions of dissent, including further targeting of the independent media and arrests of opposition political party members and peaceful protesters. Several attempts by opposition political parties to stage demonstrations were obstructed by the authorities. The Anti-Terrorism Proclamation continued to be used to silence dissidents. Opposition party members were increasingly targeted ahead of the 2015 general election.

In late April, six bloggers of the Zone 9 collective and three independent journalists associated with the group were arrested in Addis Ababa, two days after the group announced the resumption of activities, which had been suspended due to significant harassment. For nearly three months, all nine were held in the underground section of Maikelawi, denied access to family members and other visitors, and with severely restricted access to lawyers.

In July, they were charged with terrorism offences, along with another Zone 9 member charged in their absence. The charge sheet cited among their alleged crimes the use of "Security in a Box" – a selection of open-source software and materials created to assist human rights defenders, particularly those working in repressive environments.

Six of the group said they were forced to sign confessions. Three complained in remand hearings that they had been tortured, but the court did not investigate their complaints. The trial continued at the end of 2014.

Early in 2014, a "study" conducted by the national Press Agency and Ethiopian News Agency and published in the government-run *Addis Zemen* newspaper targeted seven independent publications, alleging that they had printed several articles which "promoted terrorism", denied economic growth, belittled the legacy of former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, and committed other "transgressions". In August, the government announced that it was bringing charges against several of the publications, causing over 20 journalists to flee the country. In October, the owners of three of the publications were sentenced in their absence to over three years' imprisonment each for allegedly inciting the public to overthrow the government and publishing unfounded rumours.

The OFC opposition party reported that between 350 and 500 of its members were arrested between May and July, including party leadership. The arrests started in the context of the "Master Plan" protests, but continued for several months. Many of those arrested were detained arbitrarily and incommunicado. OFC members were among over 200 people arrested in Oromia in mid-September, and further party members were arrested in October.

On 8 July, Habtamu Ayalew and Daniel Shebeshi, of the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) Party, and Yeshewas Asefa of the Semayawi Party were arrested in Addis Ababa. Abraha Desta of the Arena Tigray Party, and a lecturer at Mekele University, was arrested in Tigray, and was transferred to Addis Ababa. They were detained in Maikelawi and initially denied access to lawyers and family. In late October, they were charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. Yeshewas Asefa complained in court that he had been tortured in detention.

The Semayawi Party reported numerous arrests of its members, including seven women arrested in March during a run to mark International Women's Day in Addis Ababa, along with three men, also members of the party. They had been chanting slogans including "We need freedom! Free political prisoners!" They were released without charge after 10 days. In late April, 20 members of the party were arrested while promoting a demonstration in Addis Ababa. They were released after 11 days.

In early September, Befekadu Abebe and Getahun Beyene, party officials in Arba Minch city, were arrested along with three party members. Befekadu Abebe and Getahun Beyene were transferred to Maikelawi detention centre in Addis Ababa. In the initial stages of detention, they were reportedly denied access to lawyers and family members. In late October, party member Agbaw Setegn, was arrested in Gondar, and was also transferred to Maikelawi, and held incommunicado without access to lawyers or family.

On 27 October, editor Temesgen Desalegn was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "defamation" and "inciting the public through false rumours", in the now-defunct publication *Feteh*, after a trial that had lasted more than two years. The publisher of *Feteh* was also convicted in their absence.

People were detained arbitrarily without charge for long periods in the initial stages, or throughout the duration, of their detention including numerous people arrested for peaceful opposition to the government or their imputed political opinion. Arbitrary detention took place in official and unofficial detention centres, including Maikelawi. Many detainees were held incommunicado, and many were denied access to lawyers and family members.

Numerous prisoners of conscience, imprisoned in previous years based solely on their peaceful exercise of their freedom of expression and opinion, including journalists and opposition political

party members, remained in detention. These included some convicted in unfair trials, some whose trials continued, and some who continued to be detained without charge.

Access to detention centres for monitoring and documenting the treatment of detainees continued to be severely restricted.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture took place in local police stations, Maikelawi federal police station, federal and regional prisons and military camps.

Torture methods reported included: beating with sticks, rubber batons, gun butts and other objects; burning; tying in stress positions; electric shocks; and forced prolonged physical exercise. Some detention conditions amounted to torture, including detaining people underground without light, shackled and in prolonged solitary confinement.

Torture typically took place in the early stages of detention, in conjunction with the interrogation of the detainee. Torture was used to force detainees to confess, to sign incriminating evidence and to incriminate others. Those subjected to torture included prisoners of conscience, who were arrested for their perceived or actual expression of dissent.

Defendants in several trials complained in court that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated in detention. The courts failed to order investigations into the complaints.

In several cases, prisoners of conscience were denied access to adequate medical care.

Oromia region

Ethnic Oromos continued to suffer many violations of human rights in efforts to suppress potential dissent in the region.

Large numbers of Oromo people continued to be arrested or remained in detention after arrests in previous years, based on their peaceful expression of dissent, or in numerous cases, based only on their suspected opposition to the government. Arrests were arbitrary, often made pre-emptively and without evidence of a crime. Many were detained without charge or trial, and large numbers were detained in unofficial places of detention, particularly in military camps throughout the region. There was no accountability for enforced disappearances or extrajudicial executions during 2014 or in previous years.

In the aftermath of the "Master Plan" protests, increased levels of arrests of actual or suspected dissenters continued. Large numbers of arrests were reported, including several hundred in early October in Hurumu and Yayu Woredas districts in Illubabor province, of high-school students, farmers and other residents.

There were further reports of arrests of students asking about the fate of their classmates arrested during the "Master Plan" protests, demanding their release and justice for those killed, including 27 reported to have been arrested in Wallega University in late November.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

Forcible returns

Ethiopian government agents were active in many countries, some of which cooperated with the Ethiopian authorities in forcibly returning people wanted by the government.

In January, two representatives of the rebel Ogaden National Liberation Front were abducted and forcibly returned to Ethiopia from Nairobi, Kenya. They were in Nairobi to participate in further peace talks between the group and the government.

On 23 June, UK national Andargachew Tsige, Secretary General of the outlawed Ginbot 7 movement, was rendered from Yemen to Ethiopia. On 8 July, a broadcast was aired on state-run ETV showing Tsige looking haggard and exhausted. By the end of the year, he was still detained incommunicado at an undisclosed location, with no access to lawyers or family. The UK government continued to be denied consular access, except for two meetings with the Ambassador, to one of which Andargachew Tsige was brought hooded, and they were not permitted to talk privately.

In March, former Gambella regional governor Okello Akway, who has Norwegian citizenship, was forcibly returned to Ethiopia from South Sudan. In June, he was charged with terrorism offences along with several other people, in connection with Gambella opposition movements in exile.

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