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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Ethiopia

Southern pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of Ethiopia suffered from two consecutive seasons of very poor rains, crop failure, high livestock mortality and high cereal prices that left even the most resilient communities in crop-dependent areas struggling to cope.

Although a significant proportion of the population are food insecure, pastoral communities from Afar and Somali region, the epicentre of recurrent droughts in 2011, continued to be 'the most acutely food insecure in the country', according to FEWS.

The Ethiopian government continued to enforce restrictions on human rights organizations and the media in 2011, using the Charities and Societies Proclamation Act 2009 (the NGO Law) to curb political dissent and fundamental human rights and freedoms and control the populace, in the face of recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review to repeal the law. The wider crackdown on political activists and journalists continued to affect minority community leaders, especially those accused of supporting the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). In March, over 200 members of the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM) and the Oromo People's Congress (OPC) were arbitrarily arrested, and at least 89 were charged with various offences.

Between August and September 2011, Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa, senior members of OFDM and OPC parties respectively, Debebe Eshetu, an actor, Andualem Aragie, a

senior member of the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) opposition party, together with at least 20 ethnic Oromo were variously arrested. Journalists working for local and international media were not spared. Journalists Woubshet Taye working for *Awramba Times*, Reeyot Alemu of *Feteh*, and Elias Kifle, editor of the *Ethiopian Review*, were charged with various counts. Argaw Ashine, a correspondent of the *Kenyan Daily Nation* in Ethiopia, was forced to flee the country. Targeting journalists increases self-censorship, a likely reason why Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other organizations expressed concern that independent reporting on the conflict-affected areas of the Somali region had been severely restricted.

The Ethiopian government was set to relocate an estimated 70,000 indigenous Anuak and Nuer people from the western Gambella region into new villages by the end of 2011. The government argues that this 'villagization' scheme will enable them to provide basic social and economic services closer to people in order to foster economic and cultural development. Relocations started in 2010 in Gambella. Once indigenous peoples have been relocated, their land, normally held under trust or customary land rights, is regarded as empty or wasteland and can be leased to large companies. Compensation, when it has been provided, has been inadequate. Communities are forcibly relocated into new villages that lack adequate food, land for farming or health and education facilities. Pastoralists are being forced to abandon their cattle-based livelihoods in favour of settled cultivation.

The government plans to develop big irrigation projects and agricultural development, thereby ending the floods on which many people depend for floodplain agriculture, and to create employment opportunities for pastoralists to work on farms. These projects are part of wider government plans to resettle 1.5 million people by 2013 from Afar, Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz as well as Gambella, according to HRW.

In Ethiopia's Lower Omo Valley, the government has launched the controversial Gibe III hydro-electric project and a 245,000 hectare state-run sugar plantation. These projects have resulted in forced resettlement and human rights abuses of Mursi, Suri and Bodi agro-pastoralists at the hands of the Ethiopian army. According to the Oakland Institute, the government has not assessed the impact of the projects on the environment and livelihoods of the 500,000 indigenous people that rely on the waters and adjacent lands of the Omo River and Lake Turkana. Villagers who do not show support for the development projects are reportedly beaten, abused and intimidated. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Lower Omo Valley contains two national parks and is home to approximately 200,000 agro-pastoralists including the Kwegu, Bodi, Suri, Mursi, Nyangatom, Hamar, Karo and Daasanach.

Overall, the Ethiopian government has already leased 3.6 million hectares of land (26 per cent of the country's arable land) and an additional 2.1 million hectares is available through the federal government's land bank for agriculture, according to the Oakland Institute.

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