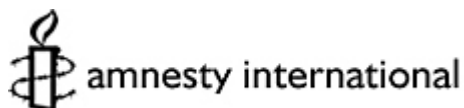


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Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Ethiopia

Head of state: **Girma Wolde-Giorgis**

Head of government: **Meles Zenawi**

Death penalty: **retentionist**

Population: **84.7 million**

Life expectancy: **59.3 years**

Under-5 mortality: **104.4 per 1,000**

Adult literacy: **29.8 per cent**

A crackdown on freedom of expression saw scores of journalists and political opposition members arrested and charged with terrorism, treason and other offences. Repressive legislation effectively prevented human rights organizations from functioning. Large tracts of land were leased to foreign companies, leading to large-scale displacement of local populations. Construction continued on a dam which could affect the lives of half a million people.

Background

On 28 May the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front celebrated its 20th anniversary of coming to power. In the capital Addis Ababa there was a pro-government demonstration, at which attendance was mandatory for civil servants. The government took steps to ensure that planned peaceful protests against the government did not take place.

Ethiopia was affected by the drought that hit the region. Severe food shortages were reported, particularly in the Somali and Oromia regions.

Skirmishes continued between government forces and armed opposition groups in several parts of the country, including the Somali, Oromia, Afar and Tigray regions.

In February, elections took place for thousands of seats in district, local and city councils. The opposition announced they were boycotting the elections as they said the outcome was predetermined.

In November and December, the Ethiopian military made incursions into Somalia.

Freedom of expression

The authorities used criminal charges and accusations of terrorism to silence dissent. Large numbers of independent journalists and members of political opposition parties were arrested on suspicion of committing terrorist offences, many after writing articles critical of the government, calling for reform or applying for demonstration permits. Detainees were denied full and prompt access to lawyers and family members.

- In March and April, at least 250 members and supporters of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) and the Oromo People's Congress (OPC) opposition parties were arrested across the Oromia region. Many were former members of parliament or the regional assembly. Some were reportedly subjected to enforced disappearance after their arrest.
- In June, journalists Woubshet Taye and Reyot Alemu, and members of the opposition Ethiopian National Democratic Party, Zerihun Gebre-Egziabher and Dejene Tefera, were arrested.
- In July, Swedish journalists Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson were arrested in the Somali region. They had entered the country illegally to report on the ongoing conflict in the region.
- In August and September, nine more members of the OFDM and OPC were arrested. Two – Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa – were arrested a few days after meeting Amnesty International delegates.
- In September, at least seven opposition party members and two journalists were arrested, including former prisoners of conscience Eskinder Nega and Andualem Arage.

By November, 107 of the journalists and opposition members mentioned above had been charged with terrorism-related crimes. Six more journalists, two opposition members and one human rights defender – all in exile – were charged in their absence. It appears that all were prosecuted because of their peaceful and legitimate activities. In December, Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson were convicted and sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment.

In September, another journalist fled the country after he was cited in a Wikileaks cable and summoned for interrogation by government officials and federal police. In November, the independent *Awramba Times* newspaper shut down, and two more journalists fled the country after being threatened with arrest.

In May, government officials and leaders of government-controlled press unions disrupted a UNESCO event to celebrate World Press Freedom Day, excluding independent journalists and installing a moderator from the state-sponsored broadcasting corporation.

Many radio stations, satellite TV stations, news websites and human rights organizations' websites were blocked, including Al Jazeera, Voice of America, ESAT satellite TV, Addis Neger news and Amnesty International's website.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Hundreds of Oromos were arrested, accused of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front. The rights of detainees were often not respected. Many were held arbitrarily without charge or trial.

- In April, many students were reportedly arrested at the universities of Jimma, Haromaya and Nekemte. Some had been protesting about other arrests in Oromia.
- In December, 135 Oromos were arrested, including further members of the OPC and OFDM parties.

Many civilians were also reportedly arrested and arbitrarily detained in the Somali region on suspicion of supporting the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Torture and extrajudicial executions of detainees in the region were regularly reported.

Large numbers of Oromos and Somalis, arrested in previous years, were believed to still be arbitrarily detained in their respective regions and in Addis Ababa. A lack of transparency made the numbers in detention impossible to verify.

- A local UN employee, arrested in late 2010, continued to be detained arbitrarily in Jijiga, reportedly in an attempt to force the return of his brother, in exile in Denmark, who was accused of involvement with the ONLF.

Torture and other ill-treatment

There were regular reports of torture in detention.

A significant number of the 107 opposition members and journalists mentioned above complained of torture or other ill-treatment during interrogation in Maikelawi detention centre. Detainees reported beatings, including with pieces of wire, metal and furniture; suspension by the wrists; sleep deprivation; and being held in isolation and in complete darkness for prolonged periods. Many reported being forced to sign confessions and other documents that would be presented against them as evidence.

The use of unofficial places of detention was also reported during the year, where detainees were reportedly badly beaten and subjected to other forms of ill-treatment.

Human rights defenders

Human rights organizations struggled to operate within restrictions on their work put in place by the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation.

In February, the Board of the Charities and Societies Agency upheld an earlier decision to freeze the bank accounts of the country's two leading human rights organizations, the Human Rights Council and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, who then appealed to the High Court. In October the Court upheld the Board's decision in the Human Rights Council's case.

Forced evictions

Forced evictions displaced tens of thousands of people in Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR); Gambella; Oromia; Tigray; and Somali regions. Some people protesting against the forced evictions were arrested.

In February, the Minister of Agriculture announced that the government had set aside 3.9 million hectares of farm land for lease to foreign investors, including 800,000 hectares in Gambella region. Large tracts of land were subsequently leased in Gambella, causing major displacement and widespread deforestation.

In February, 15,000 people in Gambella were reportedly resettled to newly built villages, with an intention to move a total of 45,000 households (approximately 225,000 people) over a three-year period. The government said that the "villagization" programme was not linked to land leasing, but part of a separate project to improve access to basic amenities, and that the majority of people were resettled voluntarily. However, it was widely reported that most people were removed by force and that the new "villages" seriously lacked the promised facilities, infrastructure and livelihood opportunities.

In April, as part of promised action against corruption, 5,000 residents of Mekele in Tigray region were ordered to demolish their homes, because the land they were built on had been illegally leased by corrupt officials. In response to protests by residents, police reportedly fired tear gas and temporarily detained around 400 protesters. Most were released, but five women who were suspected of organizing the protests were reportedly subjected to enforced disappearance after their arrest. The demolitions went ahead in May, leaving around 15,000 people homeless.

Construction continued on the Gibe III dam on the Omo river. In September, the CERD Committee requested that Ethiopia provide information on measures taken to conduct an independent assessment of the negative effects of construction on local livelihoods, and to properly consult Indigenous people. Experts say the dam could cause the

displacement of around 200,000 people in the Omo valley and hundreds of thousands more in Kenya, cause serious environmental problems, threaten two world heritage sites and possibly provoke cross-border conflict. In October around 100 Indigenous people were reportedly arrested for opposing the dam.

In October, 60 people in the SNNPR were reportedly arrested after filing a complaint to the Prime Minister about land-grabbing by the regional administration.

Conflict in the Somali region

Skirmishes continued in the long-running conflict between the ONLF and government forces.

Government forces and allied local militia reportedly continued to commit human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, mass arrests and arbitrary detentions, torture and rape. In October it was reported that the army was forcibly relocating thousands of people for the purposes of oil exploration. Many reports were impossible to verify due to the extreme restrictions on access to the region for independent journalists, human rights monitors and other observers.

In May, a UN worker was killed and two others were kidnapped in the region, reportedly by the ONLF. A UN employee who negotiated with the ONLF over the men's release was subsequently arrested and charged with terrorism offences.

Refugees

Ethiopia hosted over 250,000 refugees from neighbouring countries while demanding the forcible return of some Ethiopian refugees abroad.

Ethiopia continued to receive large numbers of refugees from neighbouring Eritrea, and Eritreans forcibly removed from other countries, including at least 212 deported from Egypt. Tens of thousands

of refugees entered Ethiopia, fleeing the humanitarian crisis in Somalia and fighting in Sudan's Blue Nile state. New refugee camps were opened to accommodate the influx.

Ethiopian refugees were forcibly returned to Ethiopia from Sudan, Djibouti, and Somaliland during the year, all reportedly at the request of the Ethiopian government. Those returned were at risk of arbitrary detention and torture.

Communal violence

In March, clashes erupted between Muslims and Christians in Jimma, Oromia region, triggered by the alleged desecration of a copy of the Qur'an. One person was killed, at least 34 Christian churches and 16 private homes were burnt, and thousands of residents were temporarily displaced. The government reported that 130 suspects had been charged with instigating religious hatred and violence.

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