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Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Head of state: **Mulatu Teshome Wirtu**

Head of government: **Hailemariam Desalegn**

Members and leaders of opposition parties as well as protesters were extrajudicially executed. General elections took place in May against a backdrop of restrictions on civil society, the media and the political opposition, including excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators, the disruption of opposition campaigns, and the harassment of election observers from the opposition. The police and the military conducted mass arrests of protesters, journalists and opposition party members as part of a crackdown on protests in the Oromia region.

BACKGROUND

The ruling political party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, won all the seats in the Federal and Regional Parliaments in the general election.

The opposition Semayawi Party reported that the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) refused to register over half of its proposed candidates for the House of Peoples' Representatives: of 400 candidates, only 139 were able to stand for election. The opposition Medrek coalition reported that the NEBE only approved 270 of the 303 candidates it had proposed to register.

Famine due to rainfall shortages during the main harvesting season (June to September) affected more than 8 million people in the north and east.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Police and security officers arrested Omot Agwa Okwoy, Ashinie Astin Titoyk and Jemal Oumar Hojele at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport on 15 March, on their way to a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. The workshop was organized by the NGO Bread for All with the support of the NGOs Anywaa Survival Organisation and GRAIN. The police held the three men for 161 days

without bail at the Maekelawi detention centre, beyond the four months allowed by the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP), under which they were charged on 7 September.

On 12 May, security officers arrested two campaigners and three supporters of the Semayawi Party who were putting up campaign posters in the capital, Addis Ababa. They were released on bail after four days in detention.

On 19 May, Bekele Gerba and other members of the Oromo Federalist Congress were campaigning in Oromia when police and local security officers beat, arrested and detained them for a couple of hours.

Over 500 members of Medrek were arrested at various polling stations in Oromia region on 24 and 25 May. Security officers beat and injured 46 people during the elections; six people sustained gunshot injuries and two were killed.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

Four members and leaders of opposition parties were killed after the election.

Samuel Aweke, founder of the Semayawi Party, was found dead on 15 June in the city of Debre Markos. A few days before his death he had published an article in his party's newspaper, *Negere Ethiopia*, criticizing the behaviour of local authorities, police and other security officials. The Semayawi Party claimed that Samuel Aweke had received threats from security officials after the article was published.

On 16 June, Medrek member Tadesse Abreha was accosted on his way home in the Western Tigray zone by three unknown people who attempted to strangle him. He died shortly after reaching his home.

Medrek member Berhanu Erbu was found dead on 19 June near a river in the Hadiya zone, 24 hours after he was taken from his home by two police officers.

Asrat Haile, election observer on behalf of Medrek in the Adio Kaka unit, Ginbo Woreda district and Kefa zone, died after being repeatedly beaten by police officials on 5 July.

None of these deaths except Samuel Aweke's was investigated. The Semayawi Party said the trial, conviction and sentencing of Samuel Aweke's killer were a "sham", intended to protect the real culprit.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In the run-up to the general elections, the government continued to use the ATP to suppress freedom of expression through the continued detention of journalists and protracted trials: it arrested and charged at least 17 journalists under the ATP. Many also fled the country due to intimidation, harassment and politically motivated criminal charges.

Police arrested Habtamu Minale, editor-in-chief of *Kedami* newspaper and reporter for *YeMiliyano*ch Dimts newspaper, on 9 July at his house. He was released on 26 July without charge.

The Public Prosecutor dropped the charges against two members of the Zone 9 bloggers' group. On 16 October, the High Court acquitted five of the Zone 9 bloggers of terrorism charges, after they had spent over 500 days in pre-trial detention.

On 22 October, the High Court convicted and sentenced in his absence Gizaw Taye, Manager of Dadimos Entertainment and Press, to 18 years' imprisonment for terrorism.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

On 27 January, police used excessive force to disperse a peaceful demonstration in Addis Ababa that was organized by the Unity for Democracy and Justice opposition party. Police beat demonstrators with batons, sticks and iron rods on the head, face, hands and legs, injuring more than 20 of them.

On 22 April, the government called a rally on Meskel Square to condemn the killing in Libya of Ethiopian migrants by affiliates of the armed group Islamic State (IS). When some demonstrators shouted slogans during the rally, police used excessive force, including tear gas and beatings, to disperse the crowd, which escalated the situation to clashes between protesters and police. A journalist reported that 48 people had been injured and admitted to hospital, and that many others sustained minor injuries. Hundreds were reported to have been arrested. Woyneshet Molla, Daniel Tesfaye, Ermias Tsegaye and Betelehem Akalework were arrested on 22 April and charged with inciting violence during the rally. They were convicted and sentenced to two months in prison, and were kept in custody for more than 10 days after the completion of their prison term, although courts had ordered their release. The police released them on bail on 2 July.

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