

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	152
Land:	Etiopien
Kilde:	U.S. Department of State
Titel:	2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices
Udgivet:	11. marts 2010
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	26. marts 2010



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2009 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR
2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices
March 11, 2010

Ethiopia is a federal republic led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition. The population is estimated at 77 million. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the EPRDF won a majority of seats to remain the ruling party for a third consecutive five-year term. In local and by-elections held in April 2008, the EPRDF and allied parties took virtually all of the more than three million open seats contested nationwide. Prior to the vote, ruling coalition agents and supporters used coercive tactics and manipulation of the electoral process, including intimidation of opposition candidates and supporters. Political parties were predominantly ethnically based, and opposition parties remained splintered. During the year fighting between government forces, including local militias, and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), an ethnically based, nationalist, insurgent movement operating in the Somali Region, resulted in continued allegations of human rights abuses, particularly diversion of food aid from intended beneficiaries suffering from a severe drought. While civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, there were numerous instances in which elements within those forces acted independently of government authority.

Human rights abuses reported during the year included unlawful killings, torture, beating, abuse and mistreatment of detainees and opposition supporters by security forces, often acting with evident impunity; poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly of suspected sympathizers or members of opposition or insurgent groups; police, administrative and judicial corruption; detention without charge and lengthy pretrial detention; infringement on citizens' privacy rights, including illegal searches; use of excessive force by security services in an internal conflict and counterinsurgency operations; restrictions on freedom of the press; arrest, detention, and harassment of journalists; restrictions on freedom of assembly and association; violence and societal discrimination against women and abuse of children; female genital mutilation (FGM); exploitation of children for economic and sexual purposes; trafficking in persons; societal discrimination against persons with disabilities and religious and ethnic minorities; and government interference in union activities, including harassment of union leaders.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

Security forces committed arbitrary and politically motivated killings during the year.

Government forces, including militias, and armed elements of the ONLF were responsible for targeted killings in the Somali region during the year (see section 1.g.).

On January 7, local police shot and killed Debasu Yengusie Mengesha and teacher Gobeze Wudu, residents of Yetnora kebele (neighborhood) in the Amhara Region while they were leaving a bar. The perpetrators were detained and remained under investigation at year's end.

On February 25, students at Gedo Secondary School (West Shoa Zone, Oromiya region) found a flier containing hateful remarks about Oromos. When the school principal delayed in investigating the case, Oromo students refused to attend classes and demonstrated inside the school compound. The principal called local police, who ordered students to disperse. When they refused, police shot and killed Wendimu Damena, a 19-year-old student. Another student, 20-year-old Belay Motuma, was shot in the chest and remained hospitalized at year's end. Two students, Berecha Folesa and Tamari Melaku Weyesa, were arrested during the demonstration and were released on bail on March 9. On March 17, six school administration employees and one agricultural bureau employee, all of whom were opposition Oromo People's Congress (OPC) candidates in the 2008 local elections, were arrested and charged with inciting violence. The case remained pending at year's end.

In October 2008 local police and militia in Zeba kebele (Dejen woreda, East Gojam zone, Amhara Region) shot and killed three brothers—Yayeh Yirad Assefa, Negusu Assefa, and Temesgen Assefa. The brothers were reportedly suspected of killing a militiaman from Najima kebele on the same date. There was no official investigation into the incident.

There were no developments in the July 2008 killing of opposition political party All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP) supporter Aschalew Taye.

In 2007 Welelaw Muche, a supporter of the former opposition party Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) in Enamrit town (West Gojjam zone, Mecha woreda, Amhara region) was shot and killed, reportedly by a government militiaman. On

May 6, a government newspaper acknowledged the death but said that the killer remained unknown.

According to a May government report, Tamene Tadesse, Gue town security chief, was charged with use of excessive force and was sentenced to 15 years in prison for the 2007 fatal shootings of two students in Gue town (Oromiya region).

There were no developments in any cases of other 2007 killings.

Addis Ababa and other areas experienced bombings that killed civilians during the year. Although no one claimed responsibility, the government charged the bombings were the work of insurgent groups or agents of Eritrea. On April 14, a land mine exploded in the Danakil Depression area of the Afar Region, killing two persons and wounding two. The government claimed the South Red Sea Rebel Liberation Front was responsible, although this remained unconfirmed.

There were no developments in the following 2008 bombing cases: the Humera public bus bombing; the Humera school explosion; the Addis Ababa gas station bombing; the minibus bombing allegedly committed by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF); the bombing of two hotels in Negele Borena, Oromiya region; the Merkato bombing; and the Jijiga hotel bombing.

On December 15, two hand grenades thrown into a crowded cafe in Kebri Dehar town, Somali region, killed one woman and wounded nine. The government claimed the perpetrators were four Eritreans supporting the rebel Ogaden National Liberation Front. Perpetrators are in police custody pending investigation.

Clashes between ethnic clans during the year resulted in hundreds of deaths (see section 6).

b. Disappearance

There were reports of politically motivated disappearances.

In February 2008, Alexander Gebre Meskel, a 40-year-old resident of Kirkos subcity, Addis Ababa, disappeared. He previously reported to his family that he was being followed by security forces. His whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.

There were no developments in the 2008 disappearances of Ethiopian Teacher's Association members Tilahun Ayalew and Anteneh Getnet.

There were no developments in the following reported 2007 disappearances: Yohannes Woldu Girma Tesfaye Ayana, Befekadu Bulti Merri, Mulatu Gebremichel, Ismail Blatta, Daniel Worku, and Amha Yirga.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the constitution and law prohibit the use of torture and mistreatment, there were numerous credible reports that security officials tortured, beat, and mistreated detainees. Opposition political party leaders reported frequent and systematic abuse and intimidation of their supporters by police and regional militias.

Numerous reliable sources confirmed that in Maekelawi, the central police investigation headquarters in Addis Ababa, police investigators often used physical abuse to extract confessions. Several political prisoners who were held at Maekelawi and other nontraditional detention facilities independently alleged in credible detail that they and other detainees were tortured in police station jails in attempts by security officials to elicit confessions before their cases went to trial. Abuses reportedly include being blindfolded and hung by the wrists for several hours, bound by chains and beaten, held in solitary confinement for several days to weeks or months, subjected to mental torture such as harassment and humiliation, forced to stand for more than 16 hours, and having heavy objects hung from the genitalia. The government generally denied reports of torture in detention centers and did not respond to specific reports of abuse.

Several of the defendants in the Ginbot Seven trial, who were arrested on April 24 and charged with attempting to engage in terrorist activities, reported harsh physical abuse and torture during pretrial interrogations. On November 13, defendants reported to the court that they were tortured by prison guards. A government spokesman denied the allegations. In December the Federal High Court convicted 40 defendants, pronouncing death sentences on Berhanu Nega, Muluneh Eyoel, Andargachew Tsige), Mesfin Aman (all charged in absentia), and Melaku Teferra.

The court pronounced life sentences on 33 convicted defendants: Alehubel Amare (charged in absentia); Yaregal Yimam (charged in absentia); Dan (full name not available; charged in absentia); Aweke Afewerk (charged in absentia); Dereje Habtewold (charged in absentia); Daniel Assefa (charged in absentia); Chekol Getahun (charged in absentia); Efreem Madebo (charged in absentia); Fasil Yenealem (charged in absentia) Brigadier General Teferra Mamo; Asamnew Tsige; Tsige Habtemaryam; Mengistu Abebe; Lt. Col. Solomon Ashagre; Lt. Col. Alemu Getenet; Major Mesekere Kassa; Lt. Col. Getachew Berele; Captain Temesgen Bayleyegn; Getu Worku; Lt. Col. Fantahun Muhaba; Lt. Col. Abere Asefa; Major Misganaw Tessema; Yeshiwas Mengesha; Emawayish Alemu; Lt. Col. Demsew Anteneh; Yeshiwas Mitiku; Gobena Belay; Amerar Bayabil; Goshirad Tsegaw; Wudneh Temesgen; Yibeltal Birhanu; Major Mekonen Worku; Kifle Sinshaw.

The court sentenced two convicted defendants--Major Aduugna Alemayehu and Major Adefris Asaminew--who had pled guilty to 10 years in a maximum security prison and deprivation of civil rights for four years.

There were no developments in the February 2008 beating of Gelaye Tadele while in local police custody in Arba Minch town of the Southern Nations region.

There were no developments in the 2007 case of Ayena Cheri, who was arrested on suspicion of being a member of the

OLF and who has alleged repeated severe beatings while in detention.

Nine of the 37 CUD members arrested and tortured in 2006 remained in prison at year's end.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

The country has three federal and 117 regional prisons. There are several unofficial detention centers operating throughout the country, including in Dedessa, Bir Sheleko, Tolay, Horat, Blate, Tatak, Jijiga, Holeta, and Senkele. Most are located at military camps and were allegedly used as overflow detention centers following mass arrests.

Prison and pretrial detention center conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. Severe overcrowding was common, especially in sleeping quarters. The government provided approximately eight birr (\$0.60) per prisoner per day for food, water, and health care. Many prisoners supplemented this with daily food deliveries from family members or by purchasing food from local vendors. Medical care was unreliable in federal prisons and almost nonexistent in regional prisons. Water shortages caused unhygienic conditions, and most prisons lacked appropriate sanitary facilities.

While statistics were unavailable, there were some deaths in prison due to illness and poor health care. Prison officials were not forthcoming about reports of such deaths. Several pardoned political prisoners had serious health problems in detention but received little treatment. In Shashamene Correctional Facility, four inmates died during an epidemic in 2008 due to lack of medical attention, according to a report by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

In December 2008 the EHRC reported there were 80,974 persons in prison, of whom 2,123 were women and 487 were children detained with their mothers. Juveniles were often incarcerated with adults, sometimes with adults who were awaiting execution. Men and women prisoners were generally, but not always, separated. Authorities generally permitted visitors but sometimes arbitrarily denied visit requests. In some cases family visits to political prisoners were restricted to a few per year. Pretrial detainees were often held together with convicted prisoners.

During the year the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited regional prisons only but remained barred from visiting any sites in the Somali region. The government continued to prevent ICRC representatives from visiting police stations and federal prisons throughout the country including those where opposition, civil society, and media leaders were held. Regional authorities allowed the ICRC to meet regularly with prisoners without third parties being present. The ICRC also continued to visit civilian Eritrean nationals and local citizens of Eritrean origin detained on alleged national security grounds.

The local nongovernmental (NGO) Prison Fellowship Ethiopia (JFA-PFE) was granted access to various prison and detention facilities, including federal prisons. JFA-PFE operated a "model" prison in Adama with significantly better conditions compared with other prisons. JFA-PFE reported that the government was supportive of their efforts. The government also periodically granted diplomatic missions access to regional prisons and prison officials, subject to advance notification.

During the year the government established regional "Justice Forums" throughout the country to improve coordination among the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Regional Security, and the Prison Administration. The government increased the budget allocated for constructing new prisons to alleviate overcrowding.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Although the constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, the government frequently did not observe these provisions in practice.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Federal Police Commission reports to the Ministry of Federal Affairs, which is subordinate to the parliament; however, this subordination is loose in practice. Local militias also operated as local security forces largely independent of the police and military. Corruption remained a problem, particularly among traffic police who routinely solicited bribes. Impunity also remained a serious problem. According to sources at government agencies, the government rarely publicly disclosed the results of investigations into abuses by local security forces, such as arbitrary detentions and beatings of civilians. The federal police acknowledged that many of its members as well as regional police lacked professionalism. In July the Addis Ababa Police Commission fired 444 staff members, including high-ranking officials, for involvement in serious crimes including armed robbery, rape, and theft. There were no prosecutions of those dismissed.

The government continued efforts to train police and army recruits in human rights. During the year the government continued to seek assistance from the ICRC, JFA-PFE, and EHRC to improve and professionalize its human-rights training and curriculum by including more material on the constitution and international human rights treaties and conventions. JFA-PFE conducted human rights training for police commissioners and members of the militia.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

Authorities regularly detained persons without warrants and denied access to counsel and family members, particularly in outlying regions. Although the law requires detainees to be brought to court and charged within 48 hours, this generally was not respected in practice. While there was a functioning bail system, it was not available in murder, treason, and corruption cases. In most cases authorities set bail between 500 and 10,000 birr (\$40 and \$800), which was too costly for most citizens. Police officials did not always respect court orders to release suspects on bail. With court approval, persons suspected of serious offenses can be detained for 14 days and for additional 14-day periods if an investigation continues.

The law prohibits detention in any facilities other than an official detention center; however, there were dozens of unofficial local detention centers used by local government militia and other formal and informal law enforcement entities. The government provided public defenders for detainees unable to afford private legal counsel, but only when their cases went to court. While in pretrial detention, authorities allowed such detainees little or no contact with legal counsel. Police continued to enter private residences and arrest individuals without warrants (see section 1.f.). Opposition party members consistently and credibly reported that in small towns, authorities detained persons in police stations for long periods without charge or access to a judge, and that sometimes these persons' whereabouts were unknown for several months. Opposition parties registered many complaints during the year that government militias beat and detained their supporters.

On April 24, security officials detained 32 persons allegedly affiliated with Ginbot Seven, an external opposition group, for their suspected involvement in a terrorist assassination plot. Those charged included several current and retired army officers, including two generals, along with senior opposition political figures. Those detained were held for more than a month without charges while police gathered evidence, during which time family members were not informed of their whereabouts. The detainees were denied pretrial access to legal counsel, and several alleged mistreatment while in detention. On August 6, the Federal High Court found 13 other defendants guilty in absentia, one not guilty in absentia, and the 32 who were detained were ordered to present their defense cases. Of the 32, the court acquitted five defendants on November 19. On December 22, the court sentenced 40 Ginbot Seven defendants: five to death, 33 to life terms, and two to 10 years' imprisonment.

On May 27, customs authorities detained Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) chairman and prominent human rights lawyer Abebe Worke and Voice Of America (VOA) reporter Meleskachew Amha for allegedly attempting to illegally sell imported duty-free publishing equipment that belonged to Addis Broadcasting Company (ABC), of which both were shareholders (see section 2.a.). Meleskachew and Abebe were detained at the Customs Authority compound, not a formal detention facility, for 12 days before being released on bail. Abebe fled the country for fear of persecution. On July 15, the Federal First Instance Court dropped all charges against Meleskachew due to lack of evidence. Abebe was sentenced in absentia to one year's imprisonment and fined 1.4 million birr (\$112,000).

ABC General Manager Amelework Tadesse and three others were arrested on the same date. Amelework was charged with attempting to illegally sell duty-free equipment to a third party. The other cases were dropped due to lack of evidence. Amelework's case was pending at year's end.

On June 1, Werebabo woreda, Bistima, town officials (South Wollo zone, Amhara region) arrested EHRCO investigator Mulugeta Fentaw. Mulugeta was returning home after investigating alleged cases of harassment of opposition political party Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) members in Bistima town. While waiting at a bus stop, Werebabo woreda Security Chief Makonnen Hussein confiscated Mulugeta's notebook, which contained sensitive summaries of his interviews. Immediately thereafter, police accused Mulugeta of stealing 2,000 birr (\$160) and arrested him. At the police station he was searched, and when police found only 200 birr (\$16) in his possession, they modified the charge to claim that he stole only 200 birr (\$16). Mulugeta was arrested and jailed for three days. He was brought to the woreda court on June 3, where he was convicted and sentenced to eight months' imprisonment. He appealed to the zonal high court. On July 17, the high court dismissed the case, stating that such acts by the woreda court eroded public confidence in the judiciary. The woreda administration appealed and brought another charge of "tarnishing the reputation of woreda officials by bringing false witnesses." Mulugeta again appealed to the high court, which dismissed the case.

One of Mulugeta's defense witnesses, Alemu Abaineh, was arrested a couple of days after testifying in court. He was accused of stealing and carrying antitank grenades and plotting to attack the militia. He was sentenced to four years' imprisonment. He appealed to the high court and was released on bail. The trial continued at year's end.

According to government reports, of those opposition AEUP members arrested at a Chendiba wedding in 2008, Wagnew Tadesse, Demissie Yehualla, Kolagie Jegne, Teffera Akemu, and Setegne Tadege were released, while Mekuanent Seneshaw, Alehegne Mekuanent, Kifle Tadege, and Endale Tadege remained in prison at year's end, charged with holding an illegal political gathering in the form of a wedding.

There were no developments in the 2007 case in which Kenyan authorities turned over to the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) 150 suspected fighters in Somalia, at least 10 of whom remained in ENDF custody.

In October 2008 officials arrested at least 53 ethnic Oromos (possibly as many as 200) for alleged support of the banned OLF. Of the 53 persons arrested, 38 were released, and the cases of the remaining 15 were pending at year's end.

In 2007 security forces arrested approximately 450 individuals, many of whom were opposition party members, suspected of supporting the OLF or carrying out terrorist activity. Of the 148 who remained in jail at the end of 2008, 35 were sentenced during the year to four to 14 years' imprisonment, while the remaining 113 were released.

Following a 2008 investigation on prison conditions, the EHRC reported that the overwhelming majority of detainees in prisons were held on pending charges. For example, only 10 percent of prisoners in Gambella prison had been convicted and 46 percent of those in Addis Ababa. Some prisoners reported being detained for several years without being charged and without trial. A lack of modern record-keeping systems resulted in prisoners sometimes not benefiting from parole and not receiving credit for time served.

In May the director general of the Federal Police reported that 65 percent of the 45,000 criminal cases filed at the federal first instance court in 2008 were eventually dropped due to lack of evidence or witnesses.

Amnesty

On September 10, regional authorities in the Amhara and Oromiya regions granted amnesty to 9,612 prisoners.

On October 5, the government granted amnesty to 384 prisoners based on a recommendation from the National Pardon Board.

On December 15, the government granted amnesty to 10 leaders and members of the former Coalition for Unity and Democracy based on a recommendation from the National Pardon Board.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary. Although the civil courts operated with independence, the criminal courts remained weak, overburdened, and subject to significant political intervention and influence. Constitutional interpretation remains solely the responsibility of the upper house of parliament, consisting exclusively of ruling party members, which also handles judicial appointments and reviews judicial conduct. In practice courts have discretion to convict defendants on charges not raised by the prosecution.

The government continued to decentralize and restructure the judiciary along federal lines with the establishment of courts at the district, zonal, and regional levels. The Federal High Court and the Federal Supreme Court heard and adjudicated original and appeal cases involving federal law, transregional matters, and national security. The regional judiciary was increasingly autonomous.

Regional offices of the federal MOJ monitored local judicial developments. Some regional courts had jurisdiction over both local and federal matters, as the federal courts in those jurisdictions had not begun operation; overall, the federal judicial presence in the regions was limited. Because of this, many citizens residing in rural areas did not have reasonable access to the federal judicial system at any level and were effectively forced to rely on traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms such as the Elders' Councils. Several women complained of lack of access to free and fair hearings in the traditional justice system because they were excluded from participation in the Elders' Councils and because there was strong gender discrimination in rural areas.

Some local officials believed they were not accountable to a higher authority.

The judicial system severely lacked experienced staff, sometimes making the application of the law unpredictable. The government continued to train lower court judges and prosecutors and made effective judicial administration the primary focus of the training. To address overcrowding, in October the government allocated 147 million birr (\$11.76 million) to construct five new courthouses in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa.

In the country's judicial system, there are federal and regional criminal courts. There are federal first instance courts, high courts, and the Supreme Court. There are also regional first instance courts and high courts. The Supreme Court maintains appellate authority over all courts.

The law provides legal standing to some preexisting religious and traditional courts and allows federal and regional legislatures to recognize decisions of such courts. By law all parties to a dispute must agree to use a traditional or religious court before such a court may hear a case, and either party can appeal to a regular court at any time. Shari'a (Islamic) courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims. In addition other traditional systems of justice, such as Councils of Elders, continued to function. These customary courts resolved disputes for the majority of citizens who lived in rural areas and generally had little access to formal judicial systems.

The federal first instance court's seventh criminal branch, headed by three judges, handled cases involving juvenile offenses and cases of sexual abuse of women and children. There was a large backlog of juvenile cases, and accused children often remained in detention with adults until officials heard their cases. There were also credible reports that domestic violence and rape cases were often significantly delayed and given low priority.

On July 7, the parliament passed the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation to address growing terrorist threats. Several human rights organizations raised concerns over the law's broad definition of terrorism, severe penalties, broad rules of evidence, and discretionary powers afforded police and security forces.

Criminal matters related to the military are handled by military tribunals. Military tribunals may not try civilians except in cases of national security. The military justice system lacked adequately trained staff to handle a growing caseload.

On November 10, the Federal Supreme Court sentenced Judge Girma Tiku, former president of the First Instance Court for Urban Affairs of Lideta subcity, Addis Ababa, to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of 1,000 birr (\$80) on corruption charges.

There were no developments in the two 2008 MOJ corruption cases against judges.

Trial Procedures

According to the law, accused persons have the right to a fair public trial by a court of law within a "reasonable time," a presumption of innocence, the right to be represented by legal counsel of their choice, and the right to appeal. However, in contrast with previous years and in limited cases, closed proceedings took place, and at times authorities allowed detainees little or no contact with legal counsel. The court system does not practice trial by juries. In principle those charged have a presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

Judicial inefficiency, lengthy trial delays, and lack of qualified staff often resulted in serious delays in trial proceedings. The Federal High Court remained open for a month and a half during its regular recess period in August and September to try to reduce the backlog of cases. The Public Defender's Office provides legal counsel to indigent defendants, although its scope and quality of service remained limited due to the shortage of attorneys. Although the law explicitly stipulates that persons charged with corruption are to be shown the evidence against them prior to their trials, several credible sources reported that authorities routinely denied defense counsel pretrial access to such evidence. The government did not establish an execution date for the 19 former Derg officials sentenced to death in 2006 for crimes of genocide, treason, and murder. All remained on death row at year's end, except Colonel Mengistu, who was in exile in Zimbabwe. According to a May government report, religious leaders requested that the government reduce the sentences of former Derg officials. The government had not responded at year's end.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Domestic and international NGOs estimated there were several hundred political prisoners and detainees. There were numerous credible reports of unlawful detention of opposition candidates and their supporters.

In September several opposition party leaders reported an intensification of arrests of opposition supporters, especially in the Oromiya and Amhara regions. Opposition parties published lists of members and supporters arrested in the past three months, including more than 360 in the Oromiya region and 230 in the Amhara region.

On July 4, Nimona Tuffa, a student at Hayume Medical College in Ambo and an opposition OPC member, was picked up by Oromiya Regional Security officials dressed in civilian clothes in Guder town. Nimona reported that security officials, including Head of Security of West Shoa Zone Tesfaye Sime, beat him, first in a nearby forest and later at the Ambo Oromo People's Democratic Organization (part of the EPRDF coalition) office, where they pressured him to sign a statement admitting he was a member of the OLF. He eventually signed. When released, Nimona was hospitalized for severe nerve-ending damage, hearing damage, and back injuries. The case was raised with the government, but no action had been taken at year's end.

In November 2008 Lema Merga, Secretary General of OPC in Southwest Shoa zone (Oromiya Region, central Ethiopia), reported he was picked up by local security officials from Wolisso town without a warrant and transported 54 miles) to Sebeta town, where he was detained. He was released on November 21 without ever appearing in court.

In mid-October 2008 approximately 20 persons, including prominent Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) member Makonnin Dheressa, were arrested and placed under the custody of the Federal Army at the Army Camp in Dembe Dollo. All were released before year's end.

In late October/early November 2008, police, local authorities, and ruling party cadres arrested 16 second-tier leaders from various opposition parties engaged in community outreach or opening new offices throughout the country. On August 12, one of the defendants was found not guilty, and the remaining 15 were ordered to present their defenses. Their cases remained pending at year's end. For example, OFDM secretary general Bekele Jirata was charged with recruiting and organizing OLF members, promoting OLF terrorist activities, and financially supporting the OLF. Bekele Jirata was released on bail on February 4, but his case was pending at the end of the year.

There was no development in the March 2008 arrest of opposition CUD supporter Chaka Robi. He remained in police custody at year's end. No charges were known to have been filed.

Popular singer Tewodros Kassahun (known as Teddy Afro) appealed his 2006 manslaughter conviction, and the court reduced his sentence from six to two years. He was released from prison on August 13. Some of Tewodros' songs were critical of the government.

Opposition UDJ party president Birtukan Mideksa, whose pardon was revoked and life sentence reinstated in December 2008, remained in prison throughout the year. She was held in solitary confinement until June, despite a court ruling that indicated it was a violation of her constitutional rights. She was also denied access to visitors except for a few close family members, despite a court order granting visitor access without restrictions. There were credible reports that Birtukan's mental health deteriorated significantly during the year.

At year's end several hundred other political detainees, including CUD, ONLF, and OLF members, remained in prison.

In 2007 the government pardoned 71 individuals arrested following demonstrations in 2005. The pardons permitted the defendants' future political participation, but in practice the government continued to limit that right.

Of the 52 individuals arrested in 2006-07 for alleged membership in the insurgent Ethiopian Patriotic Front, 48 were sentenced during the year to one to 15 years' imprisonment, three died while in prison awaiting trial, and one was acquitted.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Civil courts, which provided judicial remedy for alleged wrongs, were generally viewed as independent and impartial. The law provides citizens the right to appeal human rights violations in civil court; however, no such cases were filed during the year.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law requires authorities to obtain judicial warrants to search private property; however, in practice, particularly outside Addis Ababa, police often ignored this law. Opposition party representatives claimed that police sometimes used fraudulent search warrants to enter homes and commit criminal acts, including extorting money. There were reports that members of local militias robbed persons during the year in locations throughout Oromiya.

There continued to be reports of police forcibly entering civilian homes throughout the year.

For example, on April 16, Tirch kebele (Dejen woreda, Amahara region) and woreda officials searched the house of Walteneus Abate, vice chairman of the AEUP in that woreda, without a warrant. Although officials accused him of hiding armaments, none were found. Before leaving, local police reportedly beat his seven- and 12-year-old daughters while inquiring about his whereabouts and fired shots into the air. Walteneus has been in hiding since May. This incident marked the second attack against Waltengus' family. In November 2008 kebele officials and woreda police reportedly abducted Walteneus and tied his hands while he was herding cattle, searched his house without a warrant, found an AEUP card, beat him with rifle butts, and threatened to kill him if he did not stop accusing woreda police of torturing persons.

In July 2008 at 6 p.m., reliable reports established that, police, Bahir Dar City Administration, and kebele officials unlawfully searched the house of Yeshi Tekle-Giorgis, resident of kebele 13 of Bahir Dar town, following a disagreement with her landlord. The officials tried to force her to vacate the house, but she told them she could not vacate the house so late in the day. One of the police officers grabbed her and allegedly tried to strangle her with the scarf she was wearing. He then pushed her, and she fell down and fractured her arm. She reported the case, but no action was taken against the police officer who attacked her.

In November 2008, police and local militia reportedly searched the house of Tiringo Mengist without a warrant, a resident of Tirch kebele (Dejen wereda, Amhara region), and accused her of aiding and abetting bandits. She denied the accusation, and one of the police officers allegedly hit Tiringo with his rifle butt on her side while another police officer repeatedly hit her with a club. She reported the abuse to a local human rights organization. No action was taken against the police officers.

All but three electronic communications facilities are state owned. Political party leaders reported incidents of telephone tapping and other electronic eavesdropping. In May a former employee of ETC, the state-run monopoly telecom and Internet provider, reported from self-imposed exile that the government had ordered ETC employees to unlawfully record citizens' private telephone conversations.

The government used a widespread system of paid informants to report on the activities of particular individuals.

Security forces continued to detain family members of persons sought for questioning by the government. Kebele officials have been reported to go from house to house demanding that residents attend ruling coalition meetings. Residents are not arrested or harassed if they do not attend party meetings; however, those persons who do not attend party meetings reportedly have difficulty obtaining basic public services from their kebeles. Reliable reports establish that unemployed youth who are not affiliated with the ruling coalition have trouble receiving "support letters" from their kebeles necessary to get jobs, and that unaffiliated poor residents have trouble receiving subsidized wheat or other materials.

g. Use of Excessive Force and Other Abuses in Internal Conflicts

During the year fighting continued between government forces, including government-backed and -affiliated militia, and the ONLF, an ethnically based, nationalist, insurgent movement operating in the Ogaden area of the Somali region, triggering widespread allegations of human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict. Credible reports of human rights abuses continued, including extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, abductions, and arbitrary arrest by government soldiers. Deliveries of food and medicine were restricted as a result of insecurity, lack of capacity, and military restrictions.

Since it was outlawed in 1994, the ONLF has engaged in low-intensity armed conflict with the government. The regional conflict in Somalia that began in late 2006 spread to the Somali region and, allegedly fueled by support from the Eritrean government, resulted in greatly increased armed activity by the ONLF, whose members share ethnic ties with Somalis. During the year another insurgent group, the United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF), had a limited presence in the region.

Since the military began significant counterinsurgency operations in the Ogaden region in response to the April 2007 slaying of Chinese and domestic oil exploration workers, the government has continued to limit the access of diplomats, NGOs, and journalists to the Somali region, citing serious security concerns. Human rights groups and others asserted that the government denied access to the region to prevent potential critics and observers from monitoring ENDF operations. The government allowed some humanitarian access but restricted the ability to investigate human rights abuses. Reports of human rights violations largely have come from interviews with second-hand sources or alleged victims who have fled the Somali region. NGO personnel have been compelled by ENDF and regular police officials to report ONLF activity and faced beatings and death threats from these entities if they did not comply. Some villagers reported that local authorities threatened to retaliate against anyone who reports ENDF abuses.

Reliable sources reported increasingly violent ONLF attacks on police and military elements during the year. Civilians, international NGOs, and other aid organizations operating in the region reported that both the ENDF and the ONLF were responsible for abuses and harsh techniques used to intimidate the civilian population. Development workers reported being frequently stopped for questioning by the ONLF. However, ONLF fighters were reported to be generally supportive of development efforts and encouraged development workers to continue their work. The UWSLF, in contrast, had a more hostile attitude towards development workers.

Killings

There were several instances of killings in internal conflicts.

In February government and rebel spokesmen reported that at least 45 persons were killed in a clash between the ONLF and the ENDF near the towns of Fik and Degehebur.

Credible sources indicated that the Special Police Forces were responsible for extrajudicial killings. In early July Special Police Forces and ONLF fighters clashed between Degehabur and Kabsidakas, and between 40 and 65 Special Police members were killed. The Special Police reportedly killed two suspected ONLF members at Degehabur town market.

In early June ONLF fighters attacked an Ethiopian Roads Authority team, burning five vehicles and kidnapping 18 workers, of whom 13 were later released; there was no information available on the remaining five. In a clash on November 10, the ONLF reported that 985 government soldiers were killed. The government denied the reports.

There were no developments in the March 2008 arrests of eight men suspected of involvement in the 2007 ONLF attack on a Chinese-run oil facility in the Somali region that killed 65 civilians and nine Chinese nationals.

In November 2008 police forces attempted to force villagers from Laare and Puldeng villages (Gambella region) to move to a new area. When villagers refused, violence ensued, and police reportedly killed nine civilians and wounded 23. Two police officers were killed and six others were wounded. Police also reportedly set fire to homes and killed numerous livestock. Gambella Deputy Police Commissioner Mulugeta Ruot Kuon gave a different account. According to him, police responded to a clash between two Nuer groups and tried to facilitate a negotiation. One group started beating the police with sticks and shot one officer, triggering a gunfight that killed one police officer and four civilians and wounded 27. The conflict spread to eight kebeles, and federal police and the ENDF came to the region to calm the fighting. Traditional conflict resolution approaches facilitated by elders were used to resolve the conflict. At year's end the government had not responded to ONLF accusations that the ENDF killed 48 civilians in Mooyaha village and six civilians in Galashe in the Ogaden region in December 2008.

Abductions

In September 2008 an unknown armed group kidnapped two foreign staff members of the French NGO Medecins du Monde near Shilabo town in the Somali region. On August 1, the two staff members were released unharmed in Mogadishu.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture

International rights groups and NGOs reported that alleged unlawful killings, torture, rape, abductions, and arbitrary arrests continued in the conflict zone in the Ogaden. While there were numerous reports of human rights violations in the conflict-affected areas, there were no successful attempts at substantiating the reports due to lack of access to the region.

There were continued reports of violence against women. For example, one ethnic Somali woman reported that she was gang-raped by five Ethiopian soldiers in January near the town of Fik and that Ethiopian troops routinely raped young women in her village.

Child Soldiers

During the year the Somali Regional Security and Administration Office increased recruitment of Special Police Forces and local militias in conflict zones. Both government forces and insurgent groups in Degehabur and Fik zones reportedly recruited children as young as 14.

Other Conflict-Related Abuses

During the year the government loosened restrictions on the delivery of food aid from donor organizations into the five zones of the Somali region in which military activity was the most intense. Approximately 83 percent of food aid reached beneficiaries, a significant improvement from the previous year. Starting in January a group of international NGOs and donors attempted to work with the Somali Regional Government to establish standard operating procedures to ensure access to the region, but no agreement had been reached by year's end. NGOs operating in the region depended on permission from local militia and the ENDF to deliver humanitarian assistance. Commercial traffic into these zones somewhat increased.

The government restricted access of NGO workers and journalists to affected areas. International journalists who entered the Somali region without permission of the government were arrested or obliged to leave the country. The government continued to ban the ICRC from the region, alleging it cooperated with the ONLF. During the year, some humanitarian groups reported roadblocks manned by insurgent groups who occasionally briefly detained them. These same humanitarian groups reportedly were interrogated by the ENDF on their encounters at the roadblocks with the insurgents.

In January 2008 the ENDF placed Medicins Sans Frontieres-Holland (MSF-NL) staff members under house arrest in Warder for allegedly providing medical support to the ONLF and confiscated MSF-CH property and vehicle keys in Kebri Dehar, limiting its staff members' movement to the town for three weeks. There was no judicial process or charges filed in the cases. MSF-NL had partial access to the Ogaden region during the year.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

While the constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and press, the government did not respect these rights in practice. The government continued to arrest, harass, and prosecute journalists, publishers, and editors. The government continued to control all broadcast media except three private FM radio stations. Private sector and government journalists routinely practiced self-censorship.

Government-controlled media mostly reflected the views of the government and the ruling EPRDF coalition. However, live radio and television broadcasts occasionally included televised parliamentary debates and broadcast the views of opposition parliamentarians, as did government newspapers.

Although some new, small-circulation newspapers were published during the year, the number of private newspapers remained low. Approximately 20 private Amharic-language and English-language newspapers with political and business focuses were published, with a combined weekly circulation of more than 150,000.

The government operated the sole television station and tightly controlled news broadcasts. The broadcasting law prohibits political and religious organizations or foreigners from owning broadcast stations.

Foreign journalists and local stringers working for foreign publications at times published articles critical of the government but were subjected to government pressure to self-censor. During the year some reporters for foreign media were subjected to intimidation and harassment or threatened with expulsion from the country for publishing articles critical of the government.

During the year the government convicted and sentenced journalists for articles and reports in their publications. Journalists were intimidated, harassed, arrested, and detained on charges of defamation and threatening public order.

On April 16, the Government Communications Affairs Office summoned three VOA reporters--Peter Heinlein, Meleskachew Amha, and Eskinder Firew--and suspended the licenses of Meleskachew and Eskinder for three days for reasons never disclosed.

On July 9, unidentified individuals beat *Addis Neger* journalist Abraham Begizew, who was attempting to report on a disagreement within the leadership of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC).

On August 24, Asrat Wedajo, former editor of the now-defunct weekly *Seife Nebelbal*, was convicted in connection with a 2004 story alleging human rights violations against ethnic Oromos. The Federal High Court sentenced him to one year's imprisonment based on provisions of the Press Proclamation of 1992, notwithstanding that a new media law had superseded it in December 2008.

In February 2008 police arrested *Al-Quds* publisher Maria Kadi Abafita, *Al-Quds* editor in chief Ezeddin Mohammed, and *Salafia* publisher and editor in chief Sheikh Ibrahim Mohammed Ali following their publication of articles critical of a Ministry of Education directive on religious worship in schools. On July 27, the Federal High Court acquitted Maria Kadi Abafita, fined Ezeddin Mohammed 10,000 birr (\$800), and sentenced Ibrahim Mohammed to one year's imprisonment.

There were no developments in the March 2008 case of Dawit Kebede, editor in chief of the weekly *Awramba Times*, who was accused by the National Electoral Board (NEB) of violating the electoral regulations by posting an advertisement for his newspaper on a poster promoting EPRDF candidates for local elections.

There were no developments in the May 2008 case of Alemayehu Mahtemework and three staff members of the private Amharic monthly entertainment magazine *Enku*. The government accused them of publishing "stirring articles that could incite people" and held them for five days before release. Alemayehu was also charged with threatening public order. The magazine continued operating during the year.

In July the Federal High Court acquitted *Addis Neger* editor in chief Mesfin Negash of the defamation charges against him. In July 2008 the EOC had sued Mesfin for defamation in connection with the newspaper's reporting on an ongoing EOC embezzlement case. There were no developments in the August 2008 cases of Dawit Kebede and Wosseneged Gebrekidan, charged with inciting the public through false rumors for publishing articles about the Ginbot Seven, an opposition political group advocating change in the government by any means. Both were released on bail.

In August 2008 two police officers, one from Addis Ababa and the other from Gondar, arrested Amare Aregawi, editor in chief of the Amharic- and English-language newspaper *The Reporter*, at his office. The arrest was in connection with a private libel suit brought by the Gondar-based, ruling-party-owned Dashen Brewery in response to a July 20 *Reporter* story on a labor dispute at the brewery. Amare appeared in court on September 1 but learned there were no charges against him, and the bail money was returned to him. The article's author, Teshome Niku, appeared in court on July 30 and was released on bail of 300 birr (\$29) on August 1. Following his release, Teshome reportedly received anonymous, threatening telephone calls and was beaten and intimidated by unidentified persons in September 2008. In January a private newspaper reported that Teshome fled to Kenya. The Dashen Brewery manager filed defamation charges against Amare on August 13. The Federal High Court 10th Criminal Bench ordered Amare to defend his case. The case continued at year's end.

In October 2008 Amare Aregawi was attacked by civilian assailants in front of his son's school. Three individuals who admitted attacking Amare appeared at the Federal High Court and testified that they were hired to attack him. Amare reported he suspected he was attacked by agents of the government or those acting with government support who were threatened by his paper's reporting on corruption. The trial continued at year's end.

Several journalists remained in self-imposed exile, including journalists detained following the 2005 elections but released in 2007.

On September 29, Ethiopian-citizen *Washington Post* reporter (based in Addis Ababa) Kassahun Addis fled the country due to a credible fear of persecution.

In July 2008 the parliament passed the Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation, published in the official *Negarit Gazette* in December 2008. The law prohibits pretrial detention of journalists and censorship of private media, and it recognizes the right of journalists to form professional associations. However, the law allows only incorporated entities to publish print media, requires all previously licensed press to reregister, bars foreign and crossmedia ownership, grants the government unlimited rights to prosecute the media, criminalizes defamation of public officials, increases defamation fines to 100,000 birr (\$8,000), establishes "national security" as grounds for impounding materials prior to publication, provides government information officials exclusive discretion to withhold "sensitive" information without judicial review, and maintains the Communication Affairs Office's (formerly Ministry of Information--MOI) absolute authority to regulate the media.

The MOI was dissolved in October 2008. The new Communication Affairs Office reports directly to the prime minister. The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA) took over responsibility for press registration and oversight from the dissolved MOI. All existing newspapers and magazines were required to reregister with the EBA during the year.

In February the EBA issued a regulation barring newspaper and magazine publishers and those owning more than a 2 percent stake in a media house from holding positions of editor or deputy editor in the respective media houses.

In June the EBA ordered the private radio station Sheger-FM (102.1) to cease all rebroadcasts of VOA programming. Sheger had been broadcasting some VOA programs daily, mostly music, through a contractual agreement.

Regional governments censored the media during the year by prohibiting NGOs and health centers from providing information to, or allowing photography by, foreigners or journalists about malnutrition caused by the drought.

The government used its licensing authority to indirectly censor the media. On June 8, the Federal High Court denied an appeal and ruled that Sisay Agena, Serkalem Fasil, and Eskinder Nega could not be granted press licenses due to a 2005 court ruling that called for the dissolution of their former publishing companies. While the defendants had been acquitted of all charges and their former companies remained defunct, the High Court found that granting licenses to these individuals would be tantamount to circumventing the 2005 High Court ruling ordering the dissolution of the former companies.

On February 6, the Federal High Court dropped the monetary fines levied against the same three publishers in July 2008 for a combined amount of 300,000 birr (\$24,000) in connection with their papers' coverage of the 2005 elections. They appeared in court in December 2008 and delivered a written petition citing pardon law 395/2004, article 231/2, which stipulates that pardons granted to persons automatically pertain to monetary penalties against them.

The government owned the only newspaper printing press and used its monopoly position, inter alia, to regularly increase costs to publishers.

In June 2008 Ayele Chamisso, chairman of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party, filed charges against three private newspapers: *Addis Neger*, *Awramba Times*, and the now-defunct *Soreessa*. Ayele claimed that the papers used his party's name for other groups. The editor of *Awramba Times*, Dawit Kebede, appeared in court in November 2008 on defamation charges and was released on bail of 2,000 birr (\$160). He appeared in court again in December 2008. In December Ayele Chamisso asked the court to drop the charges against *Awramba Times*. The cases against the other two newspapers were pending at year's end.

In December *Addis Neger*, an Addis Ababa-based weekly often critical of government policies, ceased publishing following months of government harassment. Three staff members of *Addis Neger*--Abiy Tekle Mariam, Mesfin Negash, and Tamirat Negera--fled the country for fear of arrest.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted access to the Internet and blocked opposition Web sites, including the sites of the OLF, ONLF, Ginbot Seven, and several news blogs and sites run by opposition diaspora groups, such as *Nazret*, *Ethiopian Review*, *CyberEthiopia*, *Quatero Amharic Magazine*, *Tensae Ethiopia*, and the *Ethiopian Media Forum*.

In early March the government lifted an Internet blockade on all Ethiopian news Web sites and opposition Web sites. However, some Web sites, including nazret.com, reported being blocked again soon after.

In August 2008 a release by the NGO Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) stated that, according to reliable sources, its servers were inaccessible to users in the country and that e-mails from the country were not coming through to the CPJ. These reports emerged at the same time the CPJ was investigating the [detention](#) of *The Reporter* editor Amare Aregawi. *The Reporter* also alleged blocking of its Web site for four days during this time. CPJ's Web site was also inaccessible at other times during the year.

As of March the ETC reported 42,707 Internet subscribers. Citizens in urban areas had ready access to Internet cafes; however, rural access remained extremely limited. According to International Telecommunication Union statistics for 2008, approximately 0.45 percent of the country's inhabitants used the Internet. Mobile telephone text messaging, which restarted in September 2007, remained available. The number of mobile telephone subscribers reached 3.3 million.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom during the year. Authorities did not permit teachers at any level to deviate from official lesson plans and actively discouraged political activity and association of any kind on university campuses. Frequent reports continued of uniformed and plainclothes police officers on and around university and high school campuses. College students were reportedly pressured to pledge allegiance to the EPRDF to secure enrollment in universities or postgraduation government jobs. Non-EPRDF members were also reportedly denied teachers' benefits, transferred to undesirable posts, and restricted in promotions. There was a lack of transparency in academic staffing decisions, with numerous complaints from individuals in the academic community of bias based on party membership, ethnicity, or religion. Speech, expression, and assembly were frequently restricted on university and high school campuses.

Several elementary and high school teachers from various parts of the country complained that the government favored teachers who were members of the EPRDF in job assignment, promotion, and professional development opportunities. Teachers who were members of, or perceived to support, opposition parties--particularly in Oromiya, Tigray, Amhara, and the Southern region --reported being harassed and threatened by local officials with losing their jobs if they continued such support.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly; however, the government restricted this right. Organizers of large public meetings or demonstrations must notify the government 48 hours in advance and obtain a permit. The government sometimes issued permits to political parties to assemble in halls, but there were several complaints that the government threatened hall owners not to rent out halls to opposition political parties, effectively preventing them from doing so.

Opposition political parties frequently reported during the year that their supporters were targets of frequent and systematic harassment and violence by government security forces. Regional governments, including the Addis Ababa regional administration, were reluctant to grant permits or provide security for large meetings.

On August 16, the UDJ attempted to hold a town hall meeting in Adama after receiving permission from local authorities. Prior to the meeting, local authorities prevented the UDJ from displaying posters and announcing the meeting to the public. The meeting was disrupted by several shouting participants who, according to the UDJ, were an organized group of EPRDF supporters. Security guards did not attempt to stop the disruption. The meeting was adjourned 15 minutes after it began. The minister of communications announced that it was an illegal act, and the government would launch an investigation; however, no one was held accountable by year's end.

On August 30, the UDJ successfully held a town hall meeting in Awasa, although the local administration forbade the UDJ to publicize the event in advance.

Street demonstrations have been barred since 2005, but on April 16, the UDJ held a peaceful public demonstration in Addis Ababa to protest the rejailling of its chairperson, Birtukan Mideksa. Municipal authorities authorized the demonstration, and local and federal police coordinated security.

There were few attacks by police and militia against demonstrators, since not many public assembly permits were issued and illegal demonstrations were infrequent.

There were no developments in the 2008 beatings of Dejen town residents who were protesting local officials' stalling of the residents' application for use of nearby farmland.

There were no developments in the 2007 police shooting of two demonstrators in Damot Weyde District.

Freedom of Association

Although the law provides for freedom of association and the right to engage in unrestricted peaceful political activity, the government in practice limited this right. Opposition parties received no government subsidies for their political activities despite laws providing for them.

In accordance with the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSO law), adopted on February 13, civil society organizations (CSOs) are required to reregister by February 2010 with the recently established Charities and Societies Agency (CSA), under the authority of the MOJ. Most observers questioned the newly established CSA's capacity to register more than 3,000 CSOs by February 2010.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) screens applications for international NGOs and submits a recommendation to the MOJ whether to approve or deny registration.

The Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) has operated since 1967, but in 1993 after the EPRDF took power, an alternate, pro-EPRDF ETA was established. In 1993 the original ETA and the government-supported ETA began a prolonged legal battle over the organization's name and property rights. In 2008 the Court of Cassation ruled against the original ETA and awarded its name and property to the pro-EPRDF ETA (see section 7.a.). In August 2008 the original ETA applied to the MOJ for registration as the National Teachers Association, but was denied registration.

c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution and law provide for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice; however, local authorities and members of society occasionally infringed on this right. The EOC and Sufi Islam are the dominant religions; 80 percent of the population adhered to one or the other faith. Religious organizations, like NGOs, must renew their registration with the MOJ every three years. The EOC and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) did not reregister and did not face government sanctions, prompting some religious groups to complain of a double standard.

In accordance with the CSO law, religious organizations that undertake development activities must register their development wings separately as NGOs and follow the strict new guidelines of the CSO law.

Various religious groups seek the return of real property confiscated from them by the government between 1977 and 1991. In Addis Ababa and Oromiya, buildings that had been registered under federal statutes have been returned; however, structures registered under regional statutes were not returned.

Unlike previous years there were no reports of minority religious groups reporting discrimination in the allocation of government land for religious sites. Authorities continued to ban Waka-Feta, a traditional animist Oromo religious group, because it suspected that the group's leaders had close links to the OLF. Protestant groups occasionally accused local officials of discriminating against them when they sought land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders charged that because authorities perceived them as "newcomers," they were at a disadvantage compared with the EOC and the EIASC in the allocation of land.

On June 30, police in Dessie town (northeast Ethiopia) shot and killed Mesfin Worku, Dawit Defaru, and Bizuye Hussein, who were among a crowd demonstrating after being forced to stop unlawful construction of a church at a site that Muslims claimed was their burial ground. Several were injured in the ensuing violence. On July 7, the head of the Dessie EOC Diocese Aba Gebreselassie was arrested on charges of inciting violence. He was released on bail after seven days, and no future court appointment had been scheduled. No one was charged in connection with the three deaths. Orthodox and Muslim leaders in Dessie blamed the government for its nonresponsiveness in resolving the land dispute and for conveying conflicting messages to each side.

In December 2008 police opened fire at a public gathering near a church in the southern city of Arba-Minch, wounding three individuals. Police were reportedly attempting to disperse a crowd following a disagreement between Orthodox priests. No arrests were made by year's end.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

In most regions Orthodox Christians and Muslims generally respected each other's religious observances, and there was tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas. However, there were some highly publicized religious conflicts that heightened tensions and precipitated government intervention. Some victims in these and other instances of religious conflict sought protection from local authorities.

On January 8-10, a series of localized religious clashes in Dire Dawa in the eastern part of the country left one dead and 20 injured. In one neighborhood Muslim youth, reportedly angry about Israeli attacks on Gaza, threw stones at Christian youth who were singing religious songs in the street during the EOC Christmas holiday. Christian youth retaliated by throwing stones at Muslims until police intervened. These violent clashes spread from one neighborhood to another.

The EIASC continued to express concern over the allegedly increasing influence of Saudi-funded entities within the Muslim community, which the EIASC blamed for exacerbating tensions between Christians and Muslims.

On February 16-17 and April 23-24, the MFA held forums in each regional state, which included representatives from local government, security bureaus, and police commissioners, to build interreligious understanding and resolve sectarian conflicts.

The Jewish community numbered approximately 2,000, and there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

For a more detailed discussion, see the *2009 International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

Although the law provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, the government restricted some of these rights in practice.

Throughout the year the government severely restricted the movement of persons into and within the Ogaden area of the Somali region, arguing that its counterinsurgency operation against the ONLF posed a security threat (see section 1.g.).

The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not employ it. A steadily increasing number of citizens sought political asylum or remained abroad in self-imposed exile, including prominent human rights advocates.

In contrast to the previous year, the ICRC did not assist in the repatriation of any Ethiopians from Eritrea or Eritreans from Ethiopia because the government of Ethiopia canceled the only repatriation operation scheduled during the year. In principle, most Eritreans living in Ethiopia and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin who registered with the government in 2009 received identity cards and six-month renewable residence permits that allowed them to gain access to hospitals and

other public services.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The conflict between government and insurgent forces in the Ogaden area of the Somali region resulted in the displacement of thousands of persons (see section 1.g.). During the year violent clashes between different clans, often reflecting competition for scarce resources or disputes over territorial boundaries, caused these displacements and resulted in an estimated 248,700 IDPs, according to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), including an estimated 24,000 from the Gambella region, 83,000 from Oromiya, and 107,000 from the Somali region. In February more than 160,000 persons were displaced by conflict over land between the Garre of the Somali region and the Boran of the Oromiya region.

According to a Gambella Regional Government report, the 24,000 IDPs in the Gambella region were from Lare, Itang, and Jor woredas. Reasons for displacement included an attack by Murle people from across the southern Sudanese border and infighting among the Nuer tribe.

The Federal Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector (DRMFSS), under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, is the main government actor responsible for the emergency needs of IDPs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Agriculture, and Water Resources. However, there is no coordination mechanism and no government policy dedicated particularly to IDPs and issues related to them. The DRMFSS mandate includes only assistance and not protection, return, resettlement, or finding durable solutions, and IDP issues are dealt with mostly on an ad hoc basis.

In July Menit Goldia and Menit Shasha woreda officials forced an estimated 5,500 Bench Maji persons from their homes for unknown reasons. Many fled to Addis and appealed to several government officials. Some also filed a complaint with the Institution of the Ombudsman. Following a joint investigation by regional and zonal government authorities, a decision was made to allow those who settled in Menit Goldia and Menit Shasha woredas prior to August 1997 to resettle in their respective woredas. At year's end woreda officials continued discussions as to the process of resettlement. Those who arrived after August 1997 were sent back to the Amhara region. Vehicles were provided by the Amhara Regional Government, but most of the victims chose not to go because they considered themselves to be from the Welkite and Gojeb areas in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's (SNNP) region.

Protection of Refugees

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of the Refugee Problem in Africa. The government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. In practice the government provided protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, and it granted refugee status and asylum. The government generally cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and returning citizens. There were continued anecdotal reports that Ethiopian asylum seekers deported from Yemen were detained upon return to Ethiopia.

In April the government, in cooperation with the UNHCR, opened a new refugee camp, Bokolmayo, northwest of the town of Dolo Odo near the border with Kenya and Somalia, to accommodate new Somali refugees. The capacity of this camp was 20,000 refugees, and it held more than 18,000 at year's end. Registration of new arrivals in Bokolmayo camp averaged 1,700 per month. The UNHCR and the government's Administration for Refugee/Returnee Affairs also initiated discussions about opening a new camp for Somali refugees, to be called Melkadidi, located approximately 36 miles from Dolo Odo (and 12 miles from Bokolmayo) and with a capacity of 20,000 refugees.

As in the previous year, an average of 800 to 1,000 new Eritrean refugees arrived monthly, while approximately 400 to 600 Eritrean refugees departed monthly on secondary migration through Egypt and Sudan to go to Europe and other final destinations. The UNHCR assisted in the reception and transportation back to My Ayni of more than 150 Eritrean refugees who had been detained in Egypt and deported by the Egyptian authorities.

The government required all refugees to remain in designated camps, most of which were located near the borders with Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan, unless granted permission to live elsewhere in the country. Such permission was given primarily to attend higher education institutions, undergo medical treatment, or avoid security threats at the camps. During the year the government expanded its policy of providing greater freedom of movement to some Eritrean refugees with family members living outside of the camps. More than 600 urban refugees were registered with the UNHCR and the government, most of them from Somalia, Eritrea, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While some conflict continued between ethnic groups in the Gambella region, this did not directly interfere with the UNHCR's refugee protection activities.

The government, in cooperation with the UNHCR, continued to provide temporary protection to individuals from Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 convention and the 1967 protocol.

During the year the UNHCR processed 764 refugees who departed for resettlement abroad. In contrast to last year, interest in Sudanese repatriation has waned, and the UNHCR and the government assisted the safe, voluntary return of only 942 Sudanese refugees to their homes during the year.

As in 2008, there were no allegations of government cooperation with the government of Sudan in the forcible repatriation

of Ethiopian refugees.

On December 21, police entered Kebrebeya refugee camp and arrested eight refugees. They turned the refugees over to the military who transported the individuals to the village of Gilo, more than 18 miles away from the camp. The military shot three of those arrested, including one minor. The government told the UNHCR that the individuals were IDPs, not refugees. When shown proof from the UNHCR database that the individuals were indeed registered refugees, the authorities then claimed they were Ethiopians posing as refugees. The UNHCR requested an investigation into the killings.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution and law provide citizens the right to change their government peacefully. There were no elections scheduled or conducted during the reporting period. In practice the ruling EPRDF and its allies dominated the government. In local and by-elections held in 2008, virtually all of the more than three million seats open at the federal and local levels were taken unopposed by the ruling EPRDF and allied parties. Prior to the vote, ruling party agents and supporters engaged in coercive tactics and manipulation of the electoral process, including intimidation of opposition candidates and supporters during the period prior to the vote. Citing these obstacles, two leading opposition parties withdrew from the elections shortly beforehand.

Elections and Political Participation

The constitution provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully and to freely join a political organization of their choice; however, in practice these rights were restricted through bureaucratic obstacles and government and ruling party intimidation and arrests.

The April 2008 local and by-elections were the first nationwide elections since the historic 2005 national elections, which ended in heavy postelection violence and large-scale arrests. According to domestic and international observers, the 2005 elections, in which the EPRDF coalition won 372 of 547 seats, generally reflected the will of the people and were an important step forward in the country's democratization efforts. However, irregularities in 2005 marred polling in many areas. For instance, observers reported vote count fraud, improper handling of ballot boxes, and barring of party agents from polling stations and ballot counts. Observers also reported killings, disappearances, voter intimidation and harassment, unlawful detentions of opposition party supporters, and bribery. Opposition parties accused the NEB of ruling-party bias and of failing to address the complaints it received. Following an ad hoc complaints resolution process, the NEB decided to hold new elections in 31 constituencies in 2005; however, opposition parties boycotted due to perceived flaws in the review process.

Opposition parties made an unexpectedly strong showing in the 2005 elections, increasing their parliamentary representation from 12 to 172 seats and earning 137 of 138 Addis Ababa City Council seats. Despite this, some opposition members refused to take their seats and instead boycotted. Violent antigovernment protests then erupted in November 2005 and led to a government crackdown including arrests of several dozen opposition leaders, journalists, and civil society group members, as well as between 30,000 and 50,000 demonstrators. Most prisoners were released in three months, but many prominent individuals spent almost two years in prison, with an unknown number of individuals still in custody at year's end. Military intervention also led to widespread abuses such as arbitrary detention and killings.

In the 2008 local and by-elections polling went smoothly and peacefully, and there were no postelection mass arrests or violence, unlike in 2005. However, the preelection weeks and months were marred by innumerable and credible reports of harassment, intimidation, arrests, and killings of opposition party candidates and their supporters, and incomplete compliance by the NEB with the Electoral Law, prompting some of the major opposition parties such as the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and OFDM to boycott the election. Ruling party, regional, federal, and NEB officials mostly denied these incidents and, with few exceptions, neither rigorously investigated such allegations nor otherwise sought to hold perpetrators responsible.

This climate, along with a dearth of opposition candidates, contributed to starkly different election results from those in 2005. Of the 3.6 million local and by-election seats open to be contested, opposition parties won three: a federal parliament seat, an Addis Ababa city council seat, and a Gambella town council seat. According to the NEB, the EPRDF coalition took more than 3.5 million seats with the remainder going to noncoalition but EPRDF-allied parties. For instance, the EPRDF took 38 of 39 contested federal parliament seats and 137 of 138 Addis city council seats; this latter result was an exact reversal of 2005. Prior to the 2008 local elections, the government significantly increased the number of kebele council members. There can now be up to 300 council members for urban kebeles and up to 100 for rural kebeles.

The NEB reported a 93 percent voter turnout in the 2008 elections, approximately 24.5 million of 26.3 million registered voters. However, the government refused to allow foreign election observers and offered no basis for its reported turnout.

Opposition parties fielded very few candidates in some regions. This was due in part to widespread harassment of opposition candidates and supporters as well as the delayed reopening of party offices in 2007, following forced closures after the 2005 elections. Together, opposition parties were able to register only an estimated 16,000 candidates countrywide. For example, in one area of Oromiya where the opposition won overwhelmingly in 2005, there were 60,955 EPRDF candidates running against seven opposition candidates. Given a lack of capacity, some opposition groups chose not to contest town seats and instead focused on district and zonal seats.

In April 2008 the UEDF, a coalition of opposition parties from SNNP and Oromiya regions, announced its withdrawal from the elections. This followed their delivery to the NEB of a list of seven preconditions for their electoral participation because of incomplete implementation of the Electoral Law, including proper elections of poll observers, an end to candidate harassment, and registration of all rejected UEDF candidates.

The 2007 Electoral Law requires each polling station to have five nonpartisan observers elected from the community, or approximately 200,000 election observers for the more than 42,000 polling stations. There were, however, widespread reports that many of these poll observers were instead appointed directly by the NEB from EPRDF affiliates. The Electoral Law also allows NGOs to conduct either voter education or election observation, but not both. While the Electoral Law stipulates that election observers shall monitor the electoral process, the NEB finally released its election observation guidelines in February 2008, three months after voter registration commenced and weeks after the conclusion of candidate registration. This came too late for some NGO monitors, and others did not even request permission to observe, due to a lack of confidence in the process. Still others, such as EHRCO, simply did not receive an NEB response. In the end, the NEB approved 11 domestic NGOs as observers.

During the 2008 elections, there were reports of closed voter registration stations in pro-opposition rural areas and of prospective voters advised to return the following day after walking two or more miles. Opposition candidates also reported registration office closures and fraudulent dropping of opposition names from NEB candidate registration lists.

The EPRDF, its affiliates, and its supporters controlled 408 seats in the 547-member House of People's Representatives and all seats in the 112-member House of Federation, the upper house of parliament, whose members were appointed by regional governments and by the federal government.

The government policy of ethnic federalism led to the creation of individual constituencies to ensure representation of all major ethnic groups in the House of People's Representatives. Nevertheless, small ethnic groups lacked representation in the legislature. There were 23 nationality groups in six regional states that did not have a sufficient population to qualify for constituency seats; however, in the 2005 elections, individuals from these nationality groups competed for 23 special seats in the House of People's Representatives. Additionally, these 23 nationality groups have one seat each in the unelected, largely ceremonial House of Federation.

During the year the UEDF, UDJ, OFDM, Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty, and OPC reported arrests of members and the forced closure of political party offices throughout the country and intimidation of landlords to force them to evict the political groups (see sections 1.d. and 3).

During the year some opposition political leaders, including federal and regional members of parliament (MPs), were discouraged or blocked from traveling to their constituencies to meet with supporters, although others visited constituents without incident.

Credible sources report that on February 17, militiamen and plainclothes police officers followed and harassed federal MP and OPC member Major Mekonnen Geleta while he was visiting his constituency in Guduru woreda. Militiamen reportedly told him that he had no reason to visit the area and threatened to kill him if he returned. On February 18, Mekonnen left his constituency and took a bus to Shambu town. Mekonnen reported that two militiamen, Shewle Shibeshi and Bedada Shibeshi, followed him and rode the same bus. In Shambu town, Mekonnen was followed by several police and militiamen.

There were 116 women in the House of People's Representatives, two female judges on the 11-seat Supreme Court, and four women among the 35 state ministers.

Membership in the EPRDF conferred advantages upon its members; the party directly owns many businesses and was broadly perceived to award jobs and business contracts to loyal supporters. There were frequent credible reports that local authorities told opposition members to renounce their party membership and become EPRDF members if they wanted access to subsidized seeds and fertilizer, food relief, civil service job assignment, promotion, or retention, student university assignment and postgraduate employment, and other benefits controlled by the government.

During the year there were credible reports that teachers and other government workers had their employment terminated if they belonged to opposition political parties. According to opposition groups OFDM and the Oromo National Congress, the Oromiya Regional Government continued to dismiss opposition party members--particularly teachers--from their jobs.

There were many credible reports of ruling-party or government harassment intended to prevent individuals from joining opposition parties, registering their candidacies for elected office, or renting property. In October and November, there were several credible reports that the ruling EPRDF used humanitarian assistance to gain support for the party by denying opposition political party supporters access to humanitarian assistance, including relief food, public services, and microfinance loans.

There were numerous reports of intimidation, harassment, abuse, and detention of opposition candidates and their supporters. For example, in March Getachew Teshale Kassa, federal MP and opposition party member, fled the country after he reported being harassed, beaten, and tortured by government security officials near the Awi desert, Amhara region.

In early June UDJ party members Getahun Abdu Bushra, Mekonnen Abdu Hida, Abdu Seid Amede, Mubarek Seid, and Girma Teshome in South Wello zone, Amhara region, all alleged being harassed and beaten by local authorities.

On July 4, Oromiya regional security officials beat university student and OPC member Nimona Tuffa in a forest near Guder town (see section 1.e.). The government did not investigate the case.

There were no developments in the 2008 beating of federal MP Gutu Mulisa and suspected CUD supporter Bilisuma Shuge.

Registered political parties must receive permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices. There were, however, widespread reports of opposition parties closing offices due to intimidation and coercion by local officials. A common tactic reported was to intimidate landlords into evicting their political party tenants. For example, the Oromo National Congress had only one remaining office, down from more than 100 in 2005, and AEUP had 29 offices, down from 280 in 2005.

Authorities often disrupted or unlawfully banned opposition-party meetings.

Section 4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not implement these laws effectively. The World Bank's 2008 Worldwide Governance Indicators reflected that corruption remained a serious problem.

The MOJ has primary responsibility for combating corruption, largely through the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (Ethics Commission). A combination of social pressure, cultural norms, and legal restrictions somewhat limited corruption. However, government officials appeared to manipulate the privatization process, and state- and party-owned businesses received preferential access to land leases and credit.

Public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws.

In February the Ethics Commission reported that it conducted investigations on and arrested 203 corruption suspects from August 2008 to January 2009. The Ethics Commission also reported it held a training session for 553 persons on the concept of ethics, the anticorruption law, and corruption-prevention strategies.

In October federal MP Belete Etana Disassa published a testimony alleging several instances of serious corruption within the federal government, including illegal procurement, unlawful payments, and unaccounted spending amounting to more than 2.5 billion birr (\$200 million).

In February 2008 the Ethics Commission arrested Tesfaye Birru, former ETC managing director, and 12 other senior management staff and accused them of approving an equipment and technology contract that violated government bid regulations and cost 1.52 billion birr (\$126 million). In August the ETC found that the evidence against Tesfaye and the others presented a prima facie case of corruption and ordered the 12 defendants to present their cases, which were pending at year's end.

On December 24, the Federal High Court sentenced nine army officers and Kolfe-Keranyo subcity officials of Addis Ababa from seven to 10 years' imprisonment and fines of 5,000 to 10,000 birr (\$400 to \$800) for illegally possessing land worth more than 6.7 million birr (\$532,000) for personal gains.

In 2008 the Ethics Commission accused eight high-ranking National Bank officials of involvement in a gold scandal worth 158 million birr (\$12.6 million). The Federal High Court ordered the defendants to present their cases. The cases were pending at years' end.

The law provides for public access to government information, but access was largely restricted in practice. The Press Law, passed in July 2008, included freedom of information provisions, but it will not take effect for two years.

The government publishes its laws and regulations in the national gazette prior to their taking effect. The Communication Affairs Office managed contacts between the government, the press, and the public; however, the government routinely refused to respond to queries from the private press.

Government tenders were commonly discontinued after bids were received, rereleased several times without being filled, or awarded to bidders with strong links to the government and ruling party with little to no transparency in these processes or reviews. Businesses across the private sector reported allegations of preferential access to credit, foreign exchange, relief from taxes and duties, and government contracts for ruling party-owned firms or companies owned by government loyalists.

Section 5 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated, although with significant government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. The government generally was distrustful and wary of domestic human rights groups and international observers.

Two of the most prominent domestic human rights organizations were EHRCO and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA). The government routinely discounted EHRCO's reports, labeled it a political organization, and repeatedly obstructed its activities on the ground.

EWLA's primary function was to provide legal representation for disadvantaged women. These and numerous other groups mainly engaged in civic and human rights education, advocacy, legal assistance, and trial monitoring. However, the government neither shared information on nor acknowledged the existence of human rights abuses.

On February 13, the government adopted restrictive legislation that affected numerous civil society organizations. The Charities and Societies Proclamation prohibits CSOs that receive more than 10 percent of their funding from foreign

sources from engaging in activities that promote human rights and democracy; the rights of children and persons with disabilities; equality among nations, nationalities, people, gender and religion; or conflict resolution or reconciliation. Since nearly all CSOs that work in these areas relied on foreign funding, it was likely that many would be unable to continue their activities once the law was fully implemented in February 2010. Among the CSOs affected were the two most prominent human rights organizations, EHRCO and EWLA. While both were able to reregister in December, EHRCO closed six offices by December and was operating with only its core staff. EWLA reduced its work force from 60 to 13. In late June the leaders of EHRCO and EWLA fled the country due to fear of persecution.

The government harassed individuals who worked for domestic human rights organizations. For example, on June 1, Werebabo woreda officials in South Wollo zone arrested EHRCO investigator Mulugeta Fentaw in Bistima town. He was charged with stealing 200 birr (\$16) and sentenced to eight months in prison. On July 17, the zonal high court dismissed the case (see section 1.d.).

The government generally cooperated with international organizations such as the UN. During the year, with the assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' East Africa Regional Office, the government undertook a project to prepare all of its overdue initial, combined, and periodic reports required under various international and regional human rights instruments.

The government continued to restrict Somali region access to the ICRC, MSF, and other NGOs (see section 1.g.).

The government denied the ICRC access to federal prisons, police stations, and political prisoners. There were credible reports that security officials continued to intimidate or detain local individuals to prevent them from meeting with NGOs and foreign government officials investigating abuse allegations.

From May 3 to 7, state-owned Ethiopian Television broadcast a three-part documentary claiming to refute cases of human rights abuses documented by foreign observers. The MFA initiated an ostensible "investigation" conducted by the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA--part of the Government Communication Affairs Office). Human rights abuse victims and their families, neighbors, and friends were questioned by ENA officials, sometimes while being recorded on video and escorted by armed security officers. The testimony by individuals confirming their stories of abuse to these investigators was excised from the final documentary report. The government-established EHRC investigates human rights complaints and produces both annual and thematic reports. EHRC released a report on prison conditions in December 2008.

The Office of the Ombudsman has the authority to receive and investigate complaints with respect to misadministration by executive branch offices. The office received hundreds of complaints this year, mainly focused on delays or denials in services, improper institutional decisions, promotions or demotions, and pension issues. The majority of the complaints were from the Oromiya region. It is not known which complaints were investigated or acted upon.

Section 6 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution (article 25) provides all persons equal protection without discrimination based on race, nation, nationality, or other social origin, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, property, birth, or status; however, in practice the government did not fully promote and protect these rights.

Women

The constitution (article 35) provides women the same rights and protections as men. Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) such as FGM, abduction, and rape are explicitly criminalized; however, enforcement of these laws lagged. To address this, the government established a National Commission for Children's and Women's Affairs in 2005, as part of the EHRC, to investigate alleged human rights violations against women and children.

Women and girls experienced gender-based violence daily, but it was underreported due to shame, fear, or a victim's ignorance of legal protections. The National Committee for Traditional Practices in Ethiopia identified 120 HTPs. The 2005 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey found that more than 74 percent of women and girls were subjected to FGM, although the percentage was declining. The same survey found that four in five women who had been subjected to FGM in the Somali region, and three in five in the Afar region, underwent infibulation, the most severe form of FGM. In the context of gender-based violence, significant gender gaps in the justice system remained due to poor documentation, inadequate investigation, and lack of special handling of cases involving women and children.

The law criminalizes rape for which it provides penalties of five to 20 years' imprisonment, depending on the severity of the case; however, the law does not expressly address spousal rape. The government did not fully enforce the law, partially due to widespread underreporting. The Addis Ababa 2006 annual police report listed 736 rape cases out of an estimated population of 3.5 million persons; the true incidence may have been much higher. More-recent statistics on the number of abusers prosecuted, convicted, or punished were not available. However, EWLA reported that in 2006, 558 rape cases were reported and 281 offenders were punished. Additionally, in 2005, 938 incidents of rape were reported; however, only 103 offenders were punished. The length of imprisonment for offenders of both years was unknown.

Domestic violence, including spousal abuse, was a pervasive social problem. The 2005 Demographic and Health Survey found that 81 percent of women believed a husband had a right to beat his wife. A 2005 World Health Organization study found that in two rural districts, Meskan and Mareko, 71 percent of women were subject to physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner during their lifetime. Although women had recourse to the police and the courts, societal norms and limited infrastructure prevented many women from seeking legal redress, particularly in rural areas. The government prosecuted offenders on a limited scale. Domestic violence is illegal per the new criminal code. Depending on the severity of damage inflicted, punishment varies from small fines to imprisonment up to 10 to 15 years. During the year

the government expanded its efforts to combat domestic violence by setting up a hotline run by the Federal Police, under the Ministry of Federal Affairs; another domestic violence hotline established by EWLA was temporarily suspended due to budget constraints. In addition, police officers were required to receive domestic violence training from domestic NGOs and the Ministry of the Women's Affairs. Prior to 2008 the government established a deputy commissioner of women's and children's rights in the EFRC.

Prostitution was legal for persons over age 18 and was commonly practiced around the country; however, the law prohibits pimping and benefiting from the prostitution of others. Persons engaging in prostitution routinely reported that poverty was the principal reason. Article 634 of the penal code (revised May 2005) stipulates "whoever for gain makes a profession of or lives by procuring or on the prostitution or immorality of another, or maintains, as a landlord or keeper, a brothel, is punishable with simple imprisonment and fine."

Sexual harassment was widespread. The penal code prescribes 18 to 24 months' imprisonment; however, harassment-related laws were not enforced.

The law sets the legal marriage age for girls and boys at 18; however, this law was not enforced. For example, a 2006 Pathfinder International study found that in the Amhara region, 48 percent of women were married before the age of 15, the highest early marriage rate in the country.

Limited access to family planning services, high fertility, low reproductive health and emergency obstetric services, and poor nutritional status and infections all contributed to high maternal mortality ratio (673/100,000 mothers), according to the 2005 Demographic and Health Survey. Maternal health care services did not reach the majority of women, and skilled birth attendants aided only 10 percent of births. The national average for prenatal care was 28 percent.

Discrimination against women was most acute in rural areas, where 85 percent of the population was located. The law contains discriminatory regulations, such as the recognition of the husband as the legal head of the family and the sole guardian of children over five years old. Courts generally did not consider domestic violence a justification for granting a divorce. There was limited legal recognition of common law marriage. Irrespective of the number of years the marriage existed, the number of children raised, and joint property, the law entitled women to only three months' financial support if a relationship ended. A common-law husband had no obligation to provide financial assistance to his family, and as a result, women and children sometimes faced abandonment. Notwithstanding progressive provisions in the formal law, such as the family law passed in 2000, traditional courts continued to apply customary law in economic and social relationships.

According to the constitution, all land belongs to the government. However, both men and women have land use rights, which they can pass on as an inheritance as long as their offspring are also engaged in farming. Those who use the land may rent all or a portion of their land according to regional land laws, which vary from region to region. In Amhara one may rent up to 100 percent of one's land for a maximum of 25 years; in Tigray and SNNP regions, up to 50 percent of land may be rented for a maximum of 20 years; in Oromia the maximum duration of the lease is 15 years. All recently passed federal and regional land laws empower women to access government land. Inheritance laws also enable widowed women to inherit joint property they acquire during marriage. At year's end Gambella and Beni Shangul-Gumuz regions had not passed regional land laws.

In urban areas women had fewer employment opportunities than men, and the jobs available did not provide equal pay for equal work. Women's access to gainful employment, credit, and owning and/or managing a business was further limited by their low level of education and training, traditional attitudes, and limited access to information.

The Ministry of Education reported that female participation in postgraduate programs increased from 20,418 in 2003 to 63,317 in 2007 due to the expansion of higher-learning institutions, awareness trainings, and the establishment of gender offices in universities.

Children

The constitution (article 36) provides a comprehensive list of rights for children. Citizenship is derived from one's parents.

The government supported efforts by domestic and international NGOs that focused on children's social, health, and legal issues, despite its limited ability to provide improved health care, basic education, or child protection. As a policy, primary education was universal, tuition-free, and compulsory; however, there were not enough schools to accommodate the country's youth, particularly in rural areas, the cost of school supplies was prohibitive for many families, and there was no legislation to enforce compulsory primary education.

According to the NGO Save The Children's 2008 annual report, in the country there were approximately 11.3 million children without basic health care, and 84 percent of children under five did not receive basic health care.

Child abuse was widespread. Members of an NGO staffed 10 child protection units in Addis Ababa's police stations to protect the rights of juvenile delinquents and juvenile victims of crime. Some police officers received training during the year on procedures for handling cases of child abuse.

A study conducted by the African Child Policy Forum during the year revealed that prosecuting offenders of sexual violence against children was difficult due to inconsistent interpretation of laws among legal bodies and the offender's right to bail, which often resulted in the offender fleeing or coercing the victim or his family to drop the charges.

Societal abuse of young girls continued to be a problem. HTPs included FGM, early marriage, marriage by abduction, and

food and work prohibitions. A 2006 African Child Policy Forum retrospective survey indicated that 68.5 percent of girls surveyed had been sexually abused and 84 percent had been physically abused.

In the Afar Region older men continued to marry young girls, but this traditional practice continued to face greater scrutiny and criticism. Local NGOs, such as the Kembatta Women's Self-Help Center and the Tigray Women's Association, also influenced societal attitudes toward HTPs and early marriage in their areas. Regional governments in Amhara and Tigray ran programs to educate young women on issues associated with early marriage.

The majority of girls and women in the country had undergone some form of FGM. Girls typically experienced clitorectomies seven days after birth (consisting of an excision of the clitoris, often with partial labial excision) and faced infibulations (the most extreme and dangerous form of FGM) at the onset of puberty. The 2005 Health Survey by the Central Statistical Agency reported that the number of girls and women who had undergone FGM had decreased from 2000 to 2005 from 80 to 74 percent, while support for the practice among women had dropped from 60 to 29 percent. Additionally, a February 2008 study funded by Save the Children Norway reported a 24 percent national reduction in FGM cases over the past 10 years due in part to a strong anti-FGM campaign. The penal code criminalizes practitioners of clitorotomy, with imprisonment of at least three months or a fine of at least 500 birr (\$40). Likewise, infibulation of the genitals is punishable with imprisonment of five to 10 years. However, no criminal charges have ever been brought for FGM. The government discouraged the practice of FGM through education in public schools and broader mass media campaigns.

Although illegal, the abduction of women and girls as a form of marriage continued to be widespread in several regions, including the Amhara, Oromiya, and SNNP regions, despite the government's attempts to combat the practice. Forced sexual relationships accompanied most marriages by abduction, and women often experienced physical abuse during the abduction. Abductions led to conflicts among families, communities, and ethnic groups. In cases of marriage by abduction, the perpetrator did not face punishment if the victim agreed to marry the perpetrator.

Child marriage was also a problem, particularly in the Amhara and Tigray regions, where girls were routinely married as early as age seven, despite the legal minimum age of 18 for marriage. There were some signs of growing public awareness in communities of the problem of abuse of women and girls, including early marriage.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated there were between 150,000 and 200,000 street children nationally, with a further one million vulnerable or at risk of ending up on the streets. UNICEF stated the problem was exacerbated because of families' inability to support children due to parental illness and decreased household income. These children begged, sometimes as part of a gang, or worked in the informal sector. Government and privately run orphanages were unable to handle the number of street children, and older children often abused younger ones. "Handlers" sometimes maimed or blinded children to raise their earnings from begging.

There were reports during the year of recruitment of child soldiers in connection with the Somali region conflict (see section 1.g.).

There were an estimated 4.6 million orphans in the country, according to UNICEF. Government-run orphanages were overcrowded, and conditions were often unsanitary. Due to severe resource constraints, hospitals and orphanages often overlooked or neglected abandoned infants. Children did not receive adequate health care, and several infants died due to lack of adequate medical attention.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, there were reports that persons were trafficked from and within the country. The law prescribes five to 20 years' imprisonment for such crimes. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA), in collaboration with the police, is responsible for monitoring trafficking in persons, while the MOJ is responsible for enforcing laws related to trafficking.

The country is a source country for men, women, and children trafficked primarily for the purpose of forced labor and, to a lesser extent, for commercial sexual exploitation. High unemployment, extreme poverty, and the hope for better opportunities abroad drove migration. Local NGOs estimated 30,000 to 35,000 persons were trafficked internationally between March 2007 and March 2008. More women than men were trafficked. Young women, particularly those ages 16 to 30, were the most commonly trafficked group, while a small number of children were also reportedly trafficked internationally.

Rural children and adults were trafficked to urban areas for domestic servitude and, less frequently, commercial sexual exploitation and other forced labor, such as street vending, begging, traditional weaving, or agriculture; situations of debt bondage were reported. Women were trafficked transnationally for domestic servitude, primarily to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, but also to Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Some of these women were forced into the sex trade after arriving at their destinations. Small numbers of men were trafficked to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States for low-skilled forced labor.

The government suspended travel for young women to Lebanon and Syria after several women were tortured and killed. The government also suspended the travel of young women to Qatar after diplomatic ties were cut in April 2008.

On December 4, the government reported that 86 Ethiopian domestic workers were repatriated from Lebanon with the support of the Ethiopian consulate in Beirut and the government of Lebanon. Some of the repatriated domestic workers were residing in Lebanon illegally after their work permit expired, and the rest entered Lebanon illegally.

Addis Ababa's police Child Protection Unit (CPU) reported that trafficking broker networks grew increasingly sophisticated and collaborative. Traffickers began approaching vulnerable individuals at bus terminals seven to nine miles outside of Addis Ababa to avoid police presence. Traffickers sometimes used agents and brokers to lure victims with false offers of jobs, food, guidance, or shelter. Cross-country bus and truck drivers were involved in trafficking of children, while brokers, pimps, and brothel owners finalize deals at the receiving end.

Local brokers operated and recruited at the community level, and many knew the victim or victim's family. To avoid police detection and identification, local brokers did not advertise, often worked from rented houses, cafes, or hotel rooms, and they changed places often. Some brokers used commission-based facilitators who were trusted by a potential victim's family to recruit victims.

The government's efforts to prevent international trafficking increased, while measures to heighten awareness of internal trafficking remained limited. It employed two predeparture counselors to brief persons intending to work overseas, worked with NGOs and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to monitor immigration and emigration patterns for evidence of trafficking, and supervised and trained international labor migration firms.

In October Mebrat Beyene, head of diaspora affairs at the MFA, reported that the government was working with the IOM and authorities in Tripoli to secure the release of 200 Ethiopian nationals who had been detained for two years in Libya. The detainees, some of whom were trafficked, said that they were arrested in Libya en route to other nations where they would seek work. At year's end the detainees had not been released.

The government and its embassies and consulates provided little assistance to victims of trafficking: limited legal advice, infrequent temporary shelter, and no repatriation loans. Returning victims relied on psychological services provided by NGOs and government hospitals.

The government accorded no special protections or restitution, and it had very limited shelter provisions or other special services benefits for victim returnees. In 2008 there were no reports of trafficking victims being detained, jailed, or prosecuted for violations of laws, such as those governing prostitution or immigration.

While the government sustained its efforts to prosecute and punish international trafficking offenders and initiated investigations of internal child trafficking during the reporting period, no cases of internal trafficking were prosecuted. In addition, law enforcement entities lacked the institutional capacity to separate data on trafficking cases from broader fraud cases. In 2008, the CPU at the central bus terminal reported 899 cases of child trafficking to the police, an increase over the previous year.

In June 2008 the Federal High Court sentenced a man to 15 years' imprisonment and fined him 17,000 birr (\$1,360) for illegally sending a woman to Lebanon, where she was forced to work as a domestic servant and was later thrown from a building by her employer. A second defendant was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and a 5,650 birr (\$452) fine for facilitating the same woman's trafficking.

A small number of local police and border control agents were believed to accept bribes to overlook trafficking.

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution does not mandate equal rights for persons with disabilities. However, two recently passed laws prohibit discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities in employment and mandate access to buildings.

The Right to Employment of Persons with Disabilities Proclamation (no. 568), gazetted in March 2008, prohibits employment discrimination on the basis on disability. It also states that employers are responsible for providing appropriate working or training conditions and materials to disabled persons. The law specifically recognizes the additional burden on women with disabilities. The government took limited measures to enforce the law. For example, the government assigned interpreters for hearing impaired civil service employees.

The Ethiopian Building Proclamation (no. 624), gazetted in May, contains an article that mandates building accessibility and accessible toilet facilities for persons with physical disabilities. In addition, landlords are required to give persons with disabilities preference for ground floor apartments, and this was respected in practice.

Women with disabilities were more disadvantaged than men in education and employment. An Addis Ababa University study showed that female students with disabilities were subjected to a heavier burden of domestic work than their male peers. The enrollment rate for girls with disabilities was lower than for boys at the primary school level, and this gap increased at higher levels of education. Girls with disabilities also were much more likely to suffer physical and sexual abuse than able-bodied girls.

There were approximately seven million persons with disabilities, according to the Ethiopian Federation of Persons with Disabilities. There was one mental hospital and an estimated 10 psychiatrists in the country. There were several schools for hearing and visually impaired persons and several training centers for children and young persons with intellectual disabilities. There was a network of prosthetic and orthopedic centers in five of the nine regional states.

The CSO law adopted in February prohibits organizations receiving more than 10 percent of their funding from foreign sources from promoting the rights of the disabled. Several domestic associations, such as the Ethiopian National Association of the Blind, the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf, and the Ethiopian National Association of the Physically Handicapped, were negatively affected by the legislation.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There are more than 80 ethnic groups, of which the Oromo, at 40 percent of the population, was the largest. Although many groups influenced political and cultural life, Amharas and Tigrayans from the northern highlands played a dominant role. The federal system drew boundaries roughly along major ethnic group lines, and regional states had much greater control over their affairs than previously. Most political parties remained primarily ethnically based.

The military remained an ethnically diverse organization at lower levels; however, Tigrayans increasingly dominated the senior officer corps both through preferential promotions and heightened attrition among, and purges of, non-Tigrayans. There were occasional reports that officials terminated the employment of teachers and other government workers if they were not of the dominant ethnic group in the region.

Government, ONLF, and UWSLF forces were responsible for widespread human rights abuses in the Somali region (see section 1.g.).

Several minority ethnic groups in the SNNP region (composed of more than 50 minority ethnic groups) complained that the government took measures to silence indigenous voices who protested the exploitation of natural resources. On June 26, the regional State Justice Bureau of the SNNP Region revoked the licenses and suspended the activities of 42 community-based organizations (CBOs) for engaging in activities outside of their mandate. Alleged infractions included mobilizing communities against the use of fertilizers, setting up a parallel government, promoting harmful traditional practices, nontransparent remuneration and accounting practices, producing no visible development projects for the perceived amount of money the associations were receiving, and practicing traditional rites that offend Christians. All of the CBOs were cultural and environmental preservation associations. The associations denied some or all of the allegations and lodged appeals with the Office of the Prime Minister, the ombudsman, the House of People's Representatives, and the House of Federation. The case continued at year's end.

Ethnic conflict in the western, southern, and eastern areas resulted in the death of hundreds and displacement of tens of thousands of persons. For example, from November 7 to 11, 2008, a conflict over cattle grazing land between residents of Derashe Special woreda and Konso Special woreda (SNNP Region) resulted in the death of Dayat Bongo. His body was mutilated by Konso residents. Nine others were injured, and a large amount of property was damaged.

Following the incident, residents from Holte and Anota kebele (Derashe woreda) accused residents of Keyama kebele (Derashe woreda) of siding with the Konso residents. Anota kebele residents attacked Keyama kebele residents from January 2 to 4; 18 persons were killed and 26 injured.

In February a conflict between the Borena (ethnic Oromos) and Gheri (ethnic Somalis) tribes resulted in at least 600 deaths and the displacement of more than 160,000 persons. The conflict initially began as a dispute over the drilling of a borehole along the border between the regions. Another conflict between the same two groups erupted in early September, resulting in at least six deaths and 29 injured. The conflict was caused by the construction of a school and veterinary clinic on a contested piece of land.

On May 20, clashes between Oromo, Afar, and Argoba ethnic groups left 14 dead and 18 severely injured.

There was no development in the February 2008 death from stabbing of Zewdu Abate, allegedly due to ethnic tension.

In connection with a May 2008 conflict over land rights between the Oromo and Gumuz ethnic groups in the Sasiga, Diga, Bumto Gida, and Limu districts in the Oromiya region, federal and local police arrested a reported 103 suspects, including the Benishangul-Gumuz regional vice president. On August 24, the Federal High Court found 101 of the defendants guilty of ethnic cleansing and acquitted two. A few days later the same court sentenced six of the defendants to death and the remaining 95 to prison terms ranging from six years to life.

In August zonal government representatives from the Benishangul-Gumuz region complained to the House of Federation that federal authorities were not doing enough to help contain conflicts in the region.

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Homosexuality is illegal and punishable by imprisonment. Instances of homosexual activity involving coercion or involving a minor (age 13 to 16) are punishable by three months' to five years' imprisonment. Where children under 13 years of age are involved, the law provides for imprisonment of five to 25 years. There were some reports of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals; however, reporting was limited due to fears of retribution, discrimination, or stigmatization.

The AIDS Resource Center in Addis Ababa reported that the majority of self-identified gay and lesbian callers, 75 percent of whom were male, requested assistance in changing their behavior to avoid discrimination. Many gay men reported anxiety, confusion, identity crises, depression, self-ostracizing, religious conflict, and suicide attempts.

In December 2008 nearly a dozen religious figures adopted a resolution against homosexuality, urging lawmakers to endorse a ban on homosexual activity in the constitution. The group also encouraged the government to place strict controls on the distribution of pornographic materials. No action was taken on the resolution by year's end.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Societal stigma and discrimination against persons living with or affected by HIV/AIDS continued in the areas of education,

employment, and community integration. Despite the abundance of anecdotal information, there were no statistics on the scale of this problem.

Section 7 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides most workers with the right to form and join unions, and the government allowed this in practice.

However, the law specifically excludes managerial employees, teachers, and civil servants (including judges, prosecutors, and security service workers) from organizing unions. There was government interference in trade union activities during the year. Under a regulation passed in August 2008, the Ethiopian Revenue and Customs Authority's director general has the sole power to dismiss government workers suspected of corruption. Courts have no authority to reinstate workers cleared of such charges.

Based on the Council of Ministers' regulation No. 157/2008, passed in December 2008, the government sued the Workers' Association of the National Bank of Ethiopia in the Federal High Court, claiming that the bank was a nonprofit government agency and the labor union should be dissolved. On February 19, the High Court ruled that the association could not be dissolved by a regulation while the rights of workers of the bank were protected by law. The government appealed to the Supreme Court, and at year's end the case was pending.

A minimum of 10 workers is required to form a union. While the law provides all unions with the right to register, the government may refuse to register trade unions that do not meet its registration requirements. There were no reports that the government used this authority during the year. The law stipulates that a trade organization may not act in an overtly political manner. Approximately 350,000 workers were union members.

Seasonal and part-time agricultural workers cannot organize into labor unions. Compensation, benefits, and working conditions of seasonal agricultural workers were far below those of unionized permanent agricultural employees.

In 2008 the Supreme Court ruled that the independent Ethiopian Teachers Association be shut down and forfeit its name, property, and bank assets to the government-controlled ETA. The decision capped 15 years of lengthy legal proceedings and appeals. Subsequently, the original ETA applied for registration with the MOJ as the National Teachers Association but was denied registration. Leaders of the organization sued the MOJ for refusing to register their association but lost in the Federal First Instance Court. They appealed, and the case remained pending at year's end.

In July 2008 employees of Shell Ethiopia demonstrated at the gate of their head office, expressing disappointment with Shell's decision to sell its interests in the country to Oil-Libya and demanding better treatment. In November 2007 Shell Ethiopia's labor union filed a lawsuit in the Federal First Instance Court alleging that Shell Ethiopia illegally changed its retirement and severance packages to save money on unemployment payments prior to a possible closure of operations. The Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions intervened in the dispute between the labor union and Shell Ethiopia and reached an agreement that workers' full retirement and severance packages would be transferred to the successor, Oil-Libya.

In 2008 top management of the state-owned Bole Printing Enterprise disagreed with its trade union on worker compensation and terms of termination of nine fired employees. In late December an ad hoc labor advisory board composed of state ministers, representatives of the employees, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, and the management of the enterprise found that both sides were at fault and decided to reinstate the fired employees.

Although the constitution and law provide workers with the right to strike to protect their interests, it contains detailed provisions that make legal strike actions difficult to carry out, such as a minimum of 30 days' advance notice before striking if the case is referred to a court or labor relations board. The law requires aggrieved workers to attempt reconciliation with employers before striking, and includes a lengthy dispute settlement process. These applied equally to an employer's right to lock workers out. Two-thirds of the workers involved must support a strike for it to occur.

If the case has not already been referred to a court or labor relations board, workers retained the right to strike without resorting to either of these options, provided they give at least 10 days' notice to the other party and to the MOLSA and make efforts at reconciliation.

The law also prohibits strikes by workers who provide essential services, including air transport and urban bus service workers, electric power suppliers, gas station personnel, hospital and pharmacy personnel, firefighters, telecommunications personnel, and urban sanitary workers.

The law prohibits retribution against strikers, but labor leaders stated that most workers were not convinced that the government would enforce this protection. Labor officials reported that, due to high unemployment and long delays in the hearing of labor cases, some workers were afraid to participate in strikes or other labor actions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law protects the right of collective bargaining for most workers, and in practice the government allowed citizens to exercise this right freely. Labor experts estimated that collective bargaining agreements covered more than 90 percent of unionized workers. Representatives negotiated wages at the plant level. Unions in the formal industrial sector made some efforts to enforce labor regulations.

Although the law prohibits antiunion discrimination by employers against union members and organizers, unions reported

that employers frequently fired union activists. Lawsuits alleging unlawful dismissal often take years to resolve because of case backlogs in the courts. Employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination were required to reinstate workers fired for union activities and generally did so in practice.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

While the law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children, such practices occurred (see sections 6 and 7.d.).

Courts could order forced labor as a punitive measure. Both adults and children were forced to engage in street vending, begging, traditional weaving, or agriculture work. Situations of debt bondage also occurred in traditional weaving, pottery, cattle herding, and other agricultural activities, mostly in rural areas. Forced child labor occurred.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

There were laws against child labor; however, the government did not effectively implement these laws in practice, and child labor remained a serious problem, both in urban and rural areas. Under the law, the minimum age for wage or salary employment is 14 years; however, the minimum age for employment was not effectively enforced. Special provisions cover children between the ages of 14 and 18, including the prohibition of hazardous or night work. By law children between the ages of 14 and 18 are not permitted to work more than seven hours per day, between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., on public holidays or rest days, or overtime. The law defines hazardous work as work in factories or involving machinery with moving parts or any work that could jeopardize a child's health. Prohibited work sectors include transporting passengers, electric generation plants, underground work, street cleaning, and many other sectors.

A 2001 survey conducted by the Central Statistics Authority found that approximately 58 percent of boys and 42 percent of girls ages five to 14 were working. These figures were supported by a 2006 UNHCR study on the worst forms of child labor. The great majority of working children were found in the agricultural sector (95 percent), followed by services, manufacturing, and other sectors. The number of working children was higher in the Amhara, Oromiya, SNNP, and Tigray regions than in other regions. During the year the government increased investments in modernizing agricultural practices as well as in the construction of schools in efforts to combat the problem of children in agricultural sectors.

According to the MOLSA, many children worked for their families without pay. In both rural and urban areas, children often began working at young ages. The MOLSA reported that two out of five working children were below the age of six. In rural areas, children worked in agriculture on commercial and family farms and in domestic service. Children in rural areas, especially boys, engaged in activities such as cattle herding, petty trading, plowing, harvesting, and weeding, while other children, mostly girls, collected firewood and fetch water. In urban areas many children, including orphans, worked in domestic services, often working long hours which may prevent them from attending school regularly. Children in urban areas also worked in construction, manufacturing, shining shoes, making clothes, portering, directing customers to taxis, petty trading, and herding animals. Many children believed they were unable to quit their jobs and feared physical, verbal, and sexual abuse from their employers while performing their work. According to social welfare activists and civic organizers, who cited anecdotal evidence, forced child labor was poorly documented, and child laborers often faced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse at the hands of their employers.

Estimates of the population of street children varied, with government estimates of approximately 100,000 and the UNICEF estimate of 600,000. In Addis Ababa alone, there were an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 street children, according to the government, and 100,000 according to UNICEF. Some of these children worked in the informal sector to survive.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children continued during the year, particularly in urban areas. Girls as young as 11 reportedly were recruited to work in brothels, often sought by customers who believed them to be free of sexually transmitted diseases. Girls were also exploited as prostitutes in hotels, bars, resort towns, and rural truck stops. Reports indicated that some young girls were forced into prostitution by their family members. Within the country, children were trafficked from rural to urban areas for domestic service, commercial sexual exploitation, and forced labor in street vending and other activities. Reports indicated that children were trafficked from the Oromiya and the SNNP regions to other regions of the country for forced or bonded labor in domestic service.

Child labor issues are currently covered by the MOLSA, with limited support from the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Cooperation, information sharing, and coordination between and among the ministries were poor. Courts are responsible for enforcing children's rights, and criminal and civil penalties may be levied in child rights violation cases. In the absence of a national strategy, investigation and disposition of child rights violation cases was minimal.

To prevent child trafficking, a joint police-NGO child victim identification and referral mechanism operates in the capital. The CPUs in each Addis Ababa police station rescued and collected information on trafficked children that facilitated their return to their families; the CPUs referred 240 trafficked children to IOM and local NGOs for care in 2006. The CPUs also collected data on rescued children to facilitate their reunification with their families.

Internationally funded centers in Addis Ababa provided shelter, medical care, counseling, and reintegration assistance to girls victimized by trafficking. Other international NGOs provided assistance to child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, including such services as a drop-in center, shelter, educational services, skills training, guidance, assistance with income-generating and employment activities, and family reunification services.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national minimum wage. Some government institutions and public enterprises, however, set their own minimum wages. Public sector employees, the largest group of wage earners, earned a monthly minimum wage of approximately 320 birr (\$25); employees in the banking and insurance sector had a minimum monthly wage of 336 birr (\$27). According to the Office for the Study of Wages and Other Remuneration, these wages did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Consequently, most families in the wage sector required at least two wage earners to survive, which forced many children to leave school early. Only a small percentage of the population was involved in wage labor employment, which is concentrated in urban areas. Many young girls, often victims of traffickers, migrated illegally to the Gulf States in search of housekeeping work in order to assist families back home. Many of these girls were subjected to inhumane living and working conditions, and some have lost their lives. In an effort to prevent these situations, the MOLSA continued to encourage illegal employment agencies to register as legal organizations.

The Ethiopian labor law provides for a 48-hour maximum legal workweek with a 24-hour rest period, premium pay for overtime, and prohibition of excessive compulsory overtime. Although the government did little to enforce the law, in practice most employees in the formal sector worked a 40-hour workweek. However, many foreign, migrant, and informal sector workers worked more than 48 hours per week.

The government, industries, and unions negotiated occupational health and safety standards; however, the MOLSA inspection department did not effectively enforce these standards, due to lack of resources. Lack of detailed, sector-specific health and safety guidelines also precluded enforcement. Workers had the right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without jeopardizing their employment; however, most workers feared losing their jobs if they were to do so.

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