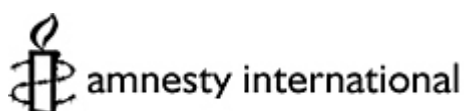


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Amnesty International Report 2010 - Ethiopia

FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

Head of state: Girma Wolde-Giorgis

Head of government: Meles Zenawi

Death penalty: retentionist

Population: 82.8 million

Life expectancy: 54.7 years

Under-5 mortality (m/f): 138/124 per 1,000

Adult literacy: 35.9 per cent

Freedom of association and expression, and the work of human rights groups, were limited by new laws introduced in the first half of the year. Human rights defenders were harassed, with some fleeing the country to avoid arrest and detention. Opposition party leader Birtukan Mideksa, who was re-arrested in December 2008, continued to serve a life sentence in prison. Some 26 people were convicted in November in the trial of more than 30 former military officers and Ginbot 7 party officials accused of plotting an armed attack on the government. Ethiopian security forces continued to carry out periodic arrests of Oromo political leaders, businessmen and their family members, who were often detained, sometimes without charge, for prolonged periods. Sporadic fighting continued between Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and armed opposition Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in the Somali Region (known as the Ogaden). Up to 6.2 million Ethiopians, many in the Somali Region, required emergency assistance because of severe drought. International donor support for humanitarian operations was insufficient.

Background

Legislation was passed restricting civil society groups and broadening the reach of counter-terror operations. Human rights defenders chose to limit their own activities and journalists to self-censor in a climate of heightened anxiety over repression.

By the end of January, nearly all remaining Ethiopian troops based in Somalia had been withdrawn, although there were reports of sporadic cross-border incursions, particularly

in the area of Beletweyne, throughout much of the year. Ethiopian government officials were also reported to have played a role in mediating negotiations between the President of Somaliland and opposition party leaders in September in Hargeisa, Somaliland. At that time, a crisis over repeated delays in national elections brought the self-declared independent country to the brink of violence (see Somalia entry).

While the government of Ethiopia hosted thousands of Eritrean, Somali and other refugees from the Horn of Africa, an increasing number of prominent opposition figures fled Ethiopia. These included human rights defenders and journalists who were harassed and intimidated by the authorities, leading them to believe that their arrest and detention could be imminent.

In September, more than 9,500 prisoners were released by the central government and by governments in the Amhara and Oromia regions, in a mass amnesty celebrating the Ethiopian New Year.

Prisoners of conscience and other political prisoners

The government continued to hold several prisoners of conscience and a large number of political prisoners in detention.

- Former judge and Unity for Democracy and Justice Party leader Birtukan Mideksa remained in detention, serving a life sentence, since she was re-arrested in December 2008. Following international calls to improve her prison conditions, government officials moved her out of solitary confinement and she was later detained with other women prisoners. She received regular family visits but her lawyer reportedly had only intermittent access to her.
- Twenty-six former military officers and others affiliated with the Ginbot 7 political party, led by Berhanu Negga, were convicted on several charges related to planning an attack on the government early in the year. Those detained for many months in this case included Ginbot 7 party leader Andargachew Tsige's father, 80-year-old Tsige Habtemariam, believed to be in very poor health. Eighteen of the defendants were reported to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated upon their arrest by Ethiopian security forces in May.
- Prisoner of conscience Sultan Fowsi Mohamed Ali, an independent mediator, remained in prison. He was arrested in Jijiga in September 2007, reportedly to prevent him from giving evidence to a UN fact-finding mission in the Somali Region.
- Bashir Makhtal, a Canadian citizen, was sentenced to life imprisonment on 3 August. He had been convicted on 27 July on four terror-related charges, including being a member of the ONLF. The government denied allegations that his trial was unfair. Bashir Makhtal consistently denied all charges. On 4 December, the Supreme Court heard his appeal, but upheld the conviction and sentence. His brother, Hassan Makhtal, was released from prison in October and died in November, reportedly from complications due to ill-treatment in detention.

Freedom of expression

The authorities introduced various laws which negatively affected freedom of expression. Media workers were harassed by the authorities.

Charities and Societies Proclamation

In January, Parliament passed the Charities and Societies Proclamation, imposing strict controls and restrictions on civil society organizations whose work included human rights. If this law is enforced, international organizations would also be restricted from

working on a range of human rights and democracy issues in Ethiopia without special permission. Similarly, local groups would be barred from human rights activities if they receive more than 10 per cent of their income from foreign sources, despite the fact that most depend heavily on support from outside Ethiopia. Even minor breaches of the law's provisions could invite severe criminal penalties, including fines and imprisonment. The Proclamation established a Charities and Societies Agency with broad discretionary power, including surveillance and interference in the management and operations of local organizations. The new law, expected to be implemented in early January 2010, puts at serious risk the ability of local and international organizations to monitor, report and advocate against human rights violations in Ethiopia. Some human rights groups scaled back their operations in the interim. Re-registration of local organizations under the new law began in October.

Anti-Terrorism Proclamation

In July, parliament passed the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation which restricted freedom of expression, and may restrict peaceful assembly and the right to a fair trial – with serious implications in the run-up to Ethiopia's 2010 parliamentary elections. According to the Proclamation, "acts of terrorism" include damage to property and disruption of public services, for which an individual could be sentenced to 15 years in prison or even the death penalty. The Proclamation's definition of "acts of terrorism" is vague and could encompass legitimate expressions of dissent.

- In November and December, Addis Neger, a major publishing company, was threatened with closure and several of its reporters threatened with arrest, reportedly under the new Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. By the end of the year a number of journalists from the company had fled the country.

Media suppression

- Ibrahim Mohamed Ali, editor of the *Salafiyya* newspaper, and Asrat Wedajo, editor of the former *Seife Nebelbal* newspaper, were each sentenced to one year in prison on charges linked to stories reporting human rights violations dating back to 2005. They were reportedly tried under an outdated press law which had since been superseded by a new media law passed in 2008.
- The owners of several of the largest newspapers, which were closed during the government's 2005 media crackdown, were threatened in November with a summons to appear before the Ethiopian Supreme Court. They were asked to pay fines, imposed on them as part of their 2005 convictions, which reportedly had previously been waived.

Repression of dissent

The government of Ethiopia continued to suppress dissent in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia, and detained hundreds of people suspected of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Many were believed to have been held in incommunicado detention and many were detained without trial. Court proceedings were frequently and repeatedly delayed. Detainees were often held in poor conditions; some were reportedly ill-treated. Group arrests and detentions of Oromo leaders, activists and businesspeople continued sporadically throughout the year. Many of these arrests and detentions were reported to have been politically motivated.

- Opposition political parties accused the government of arresting their members ahead of the scheduled 2010 elections; the majority of those named in lists of detainees were Oromo.
- There were also reports of arrests, cases of rape and extrajudicial executions by government forces of suspected supporters of the ONLF in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. Although international fact-finding missions led to some alleviation of

the humanitarian crisis in the region, Ethiopian authorities continued to place restrictions on humanitarian aid in some areas.

Death penalty

Death sentences were imposed but no executions were reported.

- On 2 September, the Ethiopian Federal High Court sentenced six people to death and 97 others to prison terms on charges of genocide in relation to violence between residents of the Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia regions over a border dispute.
- On 25 December, five men were sentenced to death, four in absentia, and 32 men and one woman to life imprisonment on charges related to an aborted coup attempt in April and May.

Amnesty International visit/reports

- Amnesty International delegates visited Ethiopia in September.
- Ethiopia: Arbitrary detention/torture or other ill-treatment: Birtukan Mideksa (AFR 25/003/2009)
- Ethiopia: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (AFR 25/004/2009)
- Ethiopia: Canadian citizen sentenced to life: Bashir Makhtal (AFR 25/006/2009)
- Ethiopia: Government passes repressive new legislation, 6 January 2009
- Ethiopia: Government must reveal fate of political prisoners, 5 May 2009
- Ethiopia: New Anti-Terrorism Proclamation jeopardizes freedom of expression, 7 July 2009

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