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## Ethiopia Lifts Some State of Emergency Restrictions

Time to End Mass Arbitrary Detentions

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Ethiopia announced this week that some of the restrictions around its five-month-old state of emergency have been lifted. The government announced that the command post, charged with enforcing the country's state of emergency in the wake of unprecedented mass protests against government policies, would no longer be able to arbitrarily arrest people or conduct property searches without warrants. Further, curfews and some restrictions on media reporting will end.

The government says that it has detained more than 20,000 people in “rehabilitation camps” – one of its long-standing approaches to obstructing protests and expressions of dissent – during the state of emergency. Detaining tens of thousands of people without charge in horrible conditions in order to indoctrinate them on government policies is not only unlawful, but unlikely to deter future protests. Human Rights Watch has interviewed many people who were



Ethiopian president Mulatu Teshome addresses members of the Ethiopian Parliament and the House of Federation about the declaration of the state of emergency, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, October 10, 2016.

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detained in these camps, and they all say the experience only served to increase their anger and frustration with the government.

The announcement that arbitrary detentions – long a significant and underreported problem in rural Ethiopia – are no longer permissible under the state of emergency is welcome news. The government hasn't permitted the United Nation's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to investigate allegations despite requests from the UN body in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2015.

Human Rights Watch and other groups have documented the Ethiopian government's use of arbitrary detention, especially outside of Addis Ababa, over many years – in police stations, prisons, military camps, and unknown places of detention. There is a lack of due process, mistreatment and torture are common, and most detainees never face trial. A Human Rights Watch report last year detailing the brutal crackdown against protesters in Oromia region highlighted the problem of mass arbitrary detention. Just two of the 46 people we interviewed who had been detained outside of Addis Ababa had been brought to court.

As part of Ethiopia's "deep reform" process, it should send a clear message to its security forces that they cannot arrest people for lawfully protesting government policies, for being members of legal opposition parties, or for other peaceful forms of dissent. Now is the time for Ethiopia to give the UN Working Group access, and stop hiding its rights record from scrutiny.

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- [4] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/22/ethiopia-frees-thousands-detainees>
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- [6] <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/16/such-brutal-crackdown/killings-and-arrests-response-ethiopias-oromo-protests>
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