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## State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010 - Ethiopia

On paper, the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia is an example of what a constitution protective of minorities in a multicultural African society should look like. The lived reality of minorities in Ethiopia in 2009, however, is a study of exclusion and oppression, suggesting that a good constitution on its own does not offer solace to minorities unless it is anchored within a supportive political culture and institutional frameworks.

According to an International Crisis Group (ICG) September 2009 report, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) policy of ethnic federalism has not dampened conflict, but rather increased competition among groups that vie over land and natural resources, as well as administrative boundaries and government budgets. 'The EPRDF's ethnic policy has empowered some groups to the disadvantage of others, deepening the sense of communal grievance that pervades the country ... [and] powerfully promoted ethnic self-awareness among all groups,' the report said.

Amnesty International (AI) reported that in 2009, 'legislation and other forms of regulation were frequently used to restrict the work of civil society and the media'. The Charities and Societies Proclamation Law was adopted on 6 January by parliament. This new law criminalizes human rights activities by foreign NGOs and by Ethiopian organizations that receive more than 10 per cent of their funding from abroad; imposes disproportionate penalties for minor administrative breaches of the law; and allows government interference in the operation and management of civil society organizations. NGOs such as the Pastoralist Forum of Ethiopia, the leading lobby for pastoralists' rights in the country, which depends on international funding to carry out its economic empowerment and governance reform programmes, will be adversely affected.

Ethiopia presented its Article 62 Report during the 46th Session of the ACHPR in November 2009. The delegation presenting the periodic report argued that the Constitution only recognizes 'nations, nationalities and peoples' and makes no mention of indigenous peoples or minorities. This understanding of minorities falls short of international standards as expressed in paragraph 5.2 of General Comment 23 on Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): 'The existence of an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority in a given state party does not depend upon a decision by the state party, but requires to be established by objective criteria.'

In contrast to Eritrea, Ethiopia showed relative tolerance for religious diversity, allowing the majority Ethiopian Coptic Church to coexist with other Christian and Islamic faiths. USCIRF reported that in 2009, minority religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), animists and practitioners of indigenous religions:

*'occasionally complained of discrimination in the allocation of land for religious sites. Protestants reported discrimination in treatment and access by local officials when seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Local authorities refused to grant land to Muslim leaders to build mosques.'*

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