

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	251
Land:	Etiopien
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom in the World 2015 - Ethiopia
Udgivet:	10. marts 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	8. maj 2015

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FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

- Vie

54

Ethiopia

Ethiopia | Freedom in the World 2015

2015



2015 SCORES

STATUS

Not Free

FREEDOM RATING
(1 = BEST, 7 = WORST)

6.0

CIVIL LIBERTIES
(1 = BEST, 7 = WORST)

6

POLITICAL RIGHTS
(1 = BEST, 7 = WORST)

6

OVERVIEW:

In 2014 the Ethiopian government continued to suppress free speech and associational rights, shattering hopes for meaningful reform under Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. Government harassment and arrest of prominent opposition and media members continued, including the April arrest of nine journalists who were charged under Ethiopia's controversial antiterrorism law. In April and May, massive protests in Oromia Regional State broke out following the announcement of the planned expansion of Addis Ababa into Oromia. At least 17 people died after the military fired on unarmed protesters.

Despite nascent signs of an opening with Eritrea, formal dialogues remain frozen between the two countries. The Ethiopian-Eritrean border remains highly militarized, though no major border clashes were reported in 2014.

Sporadic violence resumed in Ethiopia's Ogaden region after talks failed in 2013 between the government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), a separatist group that has fought for independence since 1991. In January 2014, two ONLF negotiators dispatched to Nairobi for a third round of talks were abducted and allegedly turned over to Ethiopian authorities by Kenyan police. The kidnappings effectively ended the talks.

Ethiopia ranked 32 out of 52 countries surveyed in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, below the continental average and among the bottom in East Africa. The country's modest gains in the index are due to its improvement in human development indicators, but its ranking is held back by low scores in the "Participation and Human Rights" category.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES:

Political Rights: 7 / 40 [Key]**A. Electoral Process:** 1 / 12

Ethiopia's bicameral parliament is made up of a 108-seat upper house, the House of Federation, and a 547-seat lower house, the House of People's Representatives. The lower house is filled through popular elections, while the upper chamber is selected by the state legislatures; members of both houses serve five-year terms. The lower house selects the prime minister, who holds most executive power, and the president, a largely ceremonial figure who serves up to two six-year terms. Hailemariam has served as prime minister since September 2012, and Mulatu Teshome as president since October 2013.

The 2010 parliamentary and regional elections were tightly controlled by the ruling coalition party Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), with reports of voters being threatened with losing their jobs, homes, or government services if they failed to turn out for the EPRDF. Opposition party meetings were broken up, and candidates were threatened and detained. Opposition-aligned parties saw their 160-seat presence in parliament virtually disappear,

with the EPRDF and its allies taking all but 2 of the 547 seats in the lower house. The next elections are scheduled for 2015.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

Shorn of their representation in parliament and under pressure by the authorities, opponents of the EPRDF find it difficult to operate. In July 2014, opposition members—two from Unity for Democracy Party, one from the Arena Tigray Party, and one from the Blue Party—were arrested without charges and held without access to legal representation. The Ethiopian government denies the arrests were related to 2015 elections, but the detainments follow the government's pattern of suppressing political dissent prior to popular votes.

A series of December 2014 rallies by a coalition of opposition parties saw nearly 100 people arrested, including the chairman of the Semayawi Party. Witnesses report that police beat protesters, though nearly all those arrested were released on bail within a week.

Political parties in Ethiopia are often ethnically based. The EPRDF coalition is comprised of four political parties and represents several ethnic groups. The government tends to favor Tigrayan ethnic interests in economic and political matters, and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front dominates the EPRDF. While the 1995 constitution grants the right of secession to ethnically based states, the government acquired powers in 2003 to intervene in states' affairs on issues of public security. Secessionist movements in Oromia and the Ogaden have largely failed after being put down by the military.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12

Ethiopia's governance institutions are dominated by the EPRDF, which controlled the succession process following the death of longtime Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2012.

Corruption remains a significant problem in Ethiopia. EPRDF officials reportedly receive preferential access to credit, land leases, and jobs. Petty corruption extends to lower-level officials, who solicit bribes in return for processing documents. In 2013, the government attempted to demonstrate its commitment to fighting corruption after the release of a World Bank study that detailed corruption in the country. As part of the effort, the Federal Ethics & Anti-Corruption Commission made a string of high-profile arrests of prominent government officials and businessmen throughout 2013 and 2014. The Federal High Court sentenced many corrupt officials in 2014, including in one case a \$2,500 fine and 16 years in prison. Despite cursory legislative improvements, however, enforcement of corruption-related laws remains lax in practice and Ethiopia is still considered "highly corrupt," ranked 110 out of 175 countries and territories by Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 11 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16

Ethiopia's media are dominated by state-owned broadcasters and government-oriented newspapers. Privately owned papers tend to steer clear of political issues and have low circulation. A 2008 media law criminalizes defamation and allows prosecutors to seize material before publication in the name of national security.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Ethiopia holds at least 17 journalists behind bars—the second-highest number of jailed journalists in Africa as of December 2014, after Eritrea. Restrictions are particularly tight on journalists perceived to be sympathetic to protests by the Muslim community, and journalists attempting to cover them are routinely detained or arrested. Those reporting on opposition activities also face harassment and the threat of prosecution under Ethiopia's sweeping 2009 Antiterrorism Proclamation. At least 14 journalists have been convicted under Ethiopia's antiterror law since 2011, and none convicted have been released.

In April 2014, police arrested nine journalists—six associated with the Zone9 blogging collective and three freelancers—and charged them with terror-related offenses. Their trial has been postponed 13 times and was closed to the public until recently; their defense lawyer claims the defendants were forced to sign false confessions while in prison.

In June, the government fired 18 people from a state-run, Oromia-based broadcaster, silencing the outlet's reporting on Oromo protests. In August, the government charged six Addis Ababa-based publications with terrorism offenses, effectively shuttering some of the last independent news outlets inside Ethiopia. In October, three publication owners were convicted in absentia after they fled the country. The same month, Temesgen Desalegn, former editor of the weekly *Feteh*, was convicted under Ethiopia's criminal code on defamation and incitement charges and sentenced to three years in prison.

Due to the risks of operating inside the country, many Ethiopian journalists work in exile. CPJ says Ethiopia drove 30 journalists into exile in 2014, a sharp increase over both 2012 and 2013. Authorities use high-tech jamming equipment to filter and block news websites seen as pro-opposition. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), since 2010 the Ethiopian government has developed a robust and sophisticated internet and mobile framework to monitor journalists and opposition groups, block access to unwanted websites or critical television and radio programs, and collect evidence for prosecutions in politically motivated trials.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but the government has increasingly harassed the Muslim community, which has grown to rival the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as the country's largest religious group. Muslim groups accuse the government of trying to impose the beliefs of an obscure Islamic sect, Al-Ahbash, at the expense of the dominant Sufi-influenced strain of Islam. A series of protests against perceived government interference in religious affairs since 2012 have ended in a number of deaths and more than 1,000 arrests.

Academic freedom is often restricted in Ethiopia. The government has accused universities of being pro-opposition and prohibits political activities on campuses. There are reports of students being pressured into joining the EPRDF in order to secure employment or places at universities; professors are similarly pressured in order to ensure favorable positions or promotions. The Ministry of Education closely monitors and regulates official curricula, and the research, speech, and assembly of both professors and students are frequently restricted. In 2014, the Scholars at Risk network catalogued three incidents in academia, including the jailing or firing of professors who expressed antigovernment opinions.

The presence of the EPRDF at all levels of society—directly and, increasingly, electronically—inhibits free private discussion. Many people are wary of speaking against the government. The EPRDF maintains a network of paid informants, and opposition politicians have accused the government of tapping their phones.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by the constitution but limited in practice. Organizers of large public meetings must request permission from the authorities 48 hours in advance. Applications by opposition groups are routinely denied and, in cases when approved, organizers are subject to government meddling to move dates or locations. Since 2011, ongoing peaceful demonstrations held by members of the Muslim community have been met with violent responses from security forces. Protesters allege government interference in religious affairs and politically motivated selection of members of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council. Though momentum has slowed, protests continue.

After the government announced an expansion of Addis Ababa's city limits into the Oromia Regional State in April 2014, thousands of Ethiopians took to the streets. Witnesses reported that police fired on peaceful protesters, killing at least 17—most of whom were students in nearby universities—and detained hundreds.

The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation restricts the activities of foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) by prohibiting work on political and human rights issues. Foreign NGOs are defined

as groups receiving more than 10 percent of their funding from abroad, a classification that includes most domestic organizations as well. The law also limits the amount of money any NGO can spend on “administration,” a controversial category that the government has declared includes activities such as teacher or health worker training, further restricting NGO operations even on strictly development projects. NGOs have struggled to maintain operations as a result of the law.

Trade union rights are tightly restricted. Neither civil servants nor teachers have collective bargaining rights. All unions must be registered, and the government retains the authority to cancel registration. Two-thirds of union members belong to organizations affiliated with the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, which is under government influence. Independent unions face harassment, and trade union leaders are regularly imprisoned. There has not been a legal strike since 1993.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

The judiciary is officially independent, but its judgments rarely deviate from government policy. The 2009 antiterrorism law gives great discretion to security forces, allowing the detention of suspects for up to four months without charge. After August 2013 demonstrations to protest the government’s crackdown on Muslims, 29 demonstration leaders were charged under the antiterrorism law with conspiracy and attempting to establish an Islamic state; their trial remains ongoing. Trial proceedings have been closed to the public, media, and the individuals’ families. According to HRW, some defendants claimed that their access to legal counsel has been restricted.

Conditions in Ethiopia’s prisons are harsh, and detainees frequently report abuse. A 2013 HRW report documented human rights violations in Addis Ababa’s Maekelawi police station, including verbal and physical abuse, denial of basic needs, and torture.

Yemen’s June 2014 arrest and extradition of British citizen Andargachew Tsige to Ethiopia at the government’s request has sparked outrage from human rights groups. Andargachew is the secretary-general of banned opposition group Ginbot 7 and was sentenced to death in absentia in 2009 and again in 2012 for allegedly plotting to kill government officials. Reports suggest that police have denied the British Embassy consular access.

Domestic NGOs say that Ethiopia held as many as 400 political prisoners in 2012, though estimates vary significantly. Nuredine “Aslan” Hasan, a student belonging to the Oromo ethnic group, died in prison in 2014; conflicting reports about the cause of his death—including torture—have not been verified.

The federal government generally has strong control and direction over the military, though forces such as the Liyu Police in the Ogaden territory sometimes operate independently.

Repression of the Oromo and ethnic Somalis, and government attempts to coopt their parties into subsidiaries of the EPRDF, have fueled nationalism in both the Oromia and Ogaden regions. Persistent claims that government troops in the Ogaden area have committed war crimes are difficult to verify, as independent media are barred from the region. The government’s announcement of its intention to expand Addis Ababa’s city limits into the Oromia Regional State exacerbates tensions over historical marginalization of Oromia; according to activists, the expansion will displace two million Oromo farmers.

Same-sex sexual activity is prohibited by law and punishable by up to 15 years’ imprisonment.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

While Ethiopia’s constitution establishes freedom of movement, insecurity—particularly in eastern Ethiopia—prevents unrestricted movement into affected sites.

Private business opportunities are limited by rigid state control of economic life and the prevalence of state-owned enterprises. All land must be leased from the state. The government has evicted indigenous groups from various areas to make way for projects such

as hydroelectric dams. It has also leased large tracts of land to foreign governments and investors for agricultural development in opaque deals that have displaced thousands of Ethiopians. Up to 70,000 people have been forced to move from the western Gambella region, although the government denies the resettlement plans are connected to land investments. Similar evictions have taken place in Lower Omo Valley, where government-run sugar plantations have put thousands of pastoralists at risk by diverting their water supplies. Journalists and international organizations have persistently alleged that the government withholds development assistance from villages perceived as being unfriendly to the ruling party.

Women are relatively well represented in parliament, holding 28 percent of seats and three ministerial posts. Legislation protects women's rights, but these rights are routinely violated in practice. Enforcement of the law against rape and domestic abuse is patchy, and cases routinely stall in the courts. Female genital mutilation and forced child marriage are technically illegal, though there has been little effort to prosecute perpetrators. In December 2012, the government made progress against forced child labor, passing a National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor and updating its list of problematic occupations for children.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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