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Eritrea

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Eritrea became an independent state in 1993, following an internationally monitored referendum in which citizens voted overwhelmingly for independence from Ethiopia. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which led the 30-year war for independence, has controlled the country since it defeated Ethiopian armed forces in 1991; its leader, Isaias Afwerki, serves as the President. The EPLF became the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and redefined itself as a political party in 1994; it is the sole political party in the country. Elections, which were scheduled originally for 1997, were postponed again due to the outbreak of an armed conflict with Ethiopia that began in 1998. Following the end of the conflict in 2000, the Government announced that elections would be held in December; however, elections did not take place during the year. Government officials stated that the elections were delayed because of continuing tensions with Ethiopia and problems caused by dissidents and the private press. Two committees established by the Government in 2000 to develop guidelines and rules for new elections and the formation of political parties completed their work in April. The draft electoral law and the draft law regulating the formation and activities of political parties were the subject of ongoing public discussions under government auspices. The Constitution provides for democratic freedom; however, while it was ratified in 1997, its provisions were not yet implemented by year's end. The judiciary is formally independent; however, it is weak and subject to executive interference.

The police are responsible for maintaining internal security, although the Government may call on the armed forces, the reserves, and demobilized soldiers in response to both domestic and external security requirements. These forces were under the full control of, and responsive to, the Government. In 1998 fighting broke out between the armed forces and Ethiopian militia along the border, which led to a 2-year war with Ethiopia. The Government responded to an escalating military conflict by calling up reserves and increasing its armed forces to approximately 300,000 soldiers. In addition to the border conflict, the army has had to deal with the Eritrean Islamic Salvation (EIS), a small, Sudan-based insurgent group that has mounted terrorist attacks in the north and west since 1993. Some members of the security forces committed human rights abuses.

While trade, services, and manufacturing account for the greatest portion of gross domestic product (GDP), the rural economy is based largely on subsistence agriculture, and more than 70 percent of the population of 3.6 million is engaged in farming and herding. The small industrial sector consists mostly of light industries, many using outmoded technologies. Principal exports include salt, leather products, and fish. Principal imports include machinery, spare parts, food, and military material. The economy recovered somewhat from the severe disruption inflicted in 2000 by the conflict with Ethiopia, which resulted in the dislocation of more than 1 million persons, an almost four-fold rise in inflation, an increased fiscal deficit, a drop in economic activity, increased pressure on the local currency as foreign exchange reserves fell, and a severe drop in agricultural production that made the country partially dependent on food donations. During the year, inflation fell to approximately 15 percent from 27 percent in 2000, and economic growth rose to 7 percent from negative 9 percent. The severance of trade relations with Ethiopia, the country's largest trading partner before the conflict, resulted in a 79 percent drop in exports between 1996 and 2000. The integration of as many as 75,000 Eritreans or Ethiopians of Eritrean origin deported from Ethiopia, 21,000 long-term Eritrean refugees from camps in Sudan, and the unknown number of internally displaced persons (IDP's) remaining, continued to aggravate economic pressures. In addition much of the skilled labor force continued to serve in the military. Although more foreign exchange has been made available to importers, it remains scarce and the prices of basic consumer goods have not declined much from their post-war highs. International economic assistance has accounted for a significant portion of external revenues. Eritreans who live abroad also provide a major source of external revenues, estimated to be approximately \$300 million in remittances per year. Nominal GNP was estimated at \$695 million. The country has an annual per capita income of less than \$200 (less than 2,700 Nakfa), and approximately one-third of the population depends on foreign emergency assistance. The PFDJ continues to exert a strong economic influence through a variety of investments and party-owned businesses.

The Government's poor human rights record worsened, and it committed serious abuses; however, there were improvements in a few areas. Citizens did not have the ability to change their government, which is dominated by the PFDJ. Many observers believe that the police occasionally resorted to torture and physical beatings of prisoners, particularly during interrogations, and police severely mistreated army deserters and draft evaders, although less frequently than in the previous year. There were no reports that authorities beat Ethiopian detainees or that soldiers beat and raped female Ethiopian deportees as in previous years. Prison conditions remained Spartan. The Government generally does not permit prison visits by local or international human rights groups, although it permitted some independent monitoring of conditions in detention facilities after the conflict with Ethiopia began. The Government allows the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to Ethiopian civilian detainees and POW's, although almost all Ethiopian civilians were released from

detention by year's end. Arbitrary arrests and detentions continued to be problems; the Government held incommunicado 11 persons who expressed political opinions about the Government. Their whereabouts were unknown at year's end. An unknown number of additional persons also were detained without charge, apparently for political reasons, and denied visitors. An unknown number of persons suspected of association with the Ethiopian Mengistu regime, radical Islamic elements, or terrorist organizations remained in prolonged detention during the year. The judiciary is weak and subject to executive influence. The provision of speedy trials was limited by a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure. The use of a special court system limited due process.

The Government infringed on the right to privacy. The Government severely restricted freedom of speech and press, including the rights of the religious media, by closing the private press and arresting most independent journalists, which effectively prevented all public and much private criticism of the Government. There were some limits on freedom of assembly. The Government restricted freedom of association and religious freedom in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Government restricted freedom of movement. Violence and societal discrimination against women continued to be problems, and female genital mutilation (FGM) remains widespread despite government efforts to discourage the practice. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses and members of the Kunama ethnic group also face some government and societal discrimination. The Government restricted workers' rights. There were reports of forced labor. Students are required to participate in a summer work program. Child labor occurs.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents. Unlike the previous year, there were no reports that security forces killed Ethiopian detainees.

The Government continued to deploy military police in Asmara to find deserters and draft evaders (see Section 1.d.). The Government continued to authorize the use of deadly force against anyone resisting or attempting to flee; however, there were no reports that such force was used during the year.

Two students who were detained for protesting a government-mandated summer work program died of heat-related causes (see Section 1.d.).

There were continued reports that POW's died of diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS during the year; however, these deaths were not caused by inadequate medical treatment (see Section 1.c.).

During the year, an unknown number of Ethiopian civilians were killed by explosions of landmines laid by Eritrean forces withdrawing from occupied territories. In 2000 approximately 100 Ethiopian civilians were killed in landmine explosions. According to the Government Commission for Coordination with the U.N. Peacekeeping Mission, there are an estimated 3 million landmines and unexploded ordnance in the country, including between 500,000 and 1 million landmines from the 1962-91 war for independence. On occasion some new mines reportedly were laid by the EIS or others. The Government reported that between July 1999 and August 2000, there were 17 deaths from mines or unexploded ordnance; 54 percent of those killed were children under 10 years of age. There were 46 deaths and 96 injuries as a result of landmines and unexploded ordnance during the year. However, it is not clear which landmines in particular were responsible for these casualties. It is probable that there were additional, unreported deaths in remote areas.

No reported action was taken by year's end against the camp guards who killed approximately 30 Ethiopian detainees at a camp in Wia in 2000.

In 2000 the Government deported thousands of Ethiopians to Ethiopia under difficult and dangerous conditions, which resulted in a number of deaths; a few deportees reportedly disappeared and are believed to have died. After August 2000, forced, mass deportations stopped after the end of the war with Ethiopia.

b. Disappearance

There were no confirmed reports of politically motivated disappearances. There was an unconfirmed report that in August four ethnic Kunama disappeared after they were picked up by Eritrean soldiers. There was no further information available on the case by year's end.

In September, the Government arrested 11 senior PFDJ and National Assembly members; however, their whereabouts were unknown at year's end (see Section 1.d.).

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

The transitional Penal Code prohibits torture; however, many observers believe that the police at least occasionally resorted to torture and physical beatings of prisoners, particularly during interrogations. During the year, the police severely mistreated and beat army deserters and draft evaders, although less frequently than in the previous year, and the army subjected deserters and draft evaders to various military disciplinary

actions that included prolonged sun exposure in temperatures of up to 113 degrees Fahrenheit or the tying of the hands and feet for extended periods of time (see Section 1.d.).

In August two students died and others were hospitalized for heat stroke after they were detained and made to participate in a mandatory summer work program (see Sections 1.d. and 6.c.).

Unlike in the previous year, there were no credible reports of beatings of Ethiopian detainees or rapes of female Ethiopian detainees by security forces.

During the year, there were 96 reported injuries, in addition to 46 deaths, from landmines and unexploded ordnance (see Section 1.a.). It is probable that there were additional, unreported injuries that occurred in remote areas.

No reported action was taken by year's end against the guard at the Keren detention facility, who in 2000 shot in the shoulder an Ethiopian detainee who locked himself into a room with 68 other detainees for fear of being punished.

In 2000 the Government deported to Ethiopia thousands of Ethiopians under potentially difficult and dangerous conditions without the participation of the ICRC (see Section 1.d.); some reportedly disappeared or died. The deportations stopped in August 2000 after the end of the war with Ethiopia.

In 2000 there were some instances in which private Eritrean individuals threatened and beat Ethiopians. It was not known whether any police action was taken in these cases. In some cases, police intervened too late to prevent the abuse or were unable to halt the abuse. During the year, abuse of Ethiopians by individuals was not systematic, and there were fewer cases than in the previous year.

Prison conditions remained Spartan. The Government permits three visits per week by family members. There were no confirmed reports that any prisoners died due to lack of proper medical care. Women and men are held in separate facilities. There are no juvenile detention centers or correction facilities, and juvenile offenders often are incarcerated with adults. Pretrial detainees generally are not held separately from convicted prisoners; however, in some cases, detainees may be held separately. For example, the group of 11 political detainees were held separately, although their whereabouts remained unknown. It was unknown whether other detainees were held separately, because they were denied visitors during the year.

In 2000 the Government established detention camps for Ethiopians scheduled for repatriation or deportation in a number of areas. The Government had closed all detention camps by year's end (see Section 1.d.).

It was estimated that fewer than 400 POW's were being held at a camp in Nakfa at year's end; however, the Government committed to the unconditional release of all POW's after the end of the war with Ethiopia. Conditions at the POW camp reportedly were generally good; however, some POW's died of illnesses during the year. In 2000 POW's were forced to work on road-building projects; however, following an ICRC visit in August 2000, the POW's were no longer forced to perform such labor.

The Government allowed the ICRC to visit and register Ethiopian civilian detainees in internment camps, police stations, and prisons, and to visit Ethiopian POW's; however, the ICRC was not permitted to visit the approximately 750 Ethiopian soldiers who the Government claims are deserters from the Ethiopian army. Local groups were not permitted to monitor conditions in prisons.

During the year, the Government reportedly continued to deny officials from the Government of Sudan access to 14 Sudanese prisoners arrested in 1994 (see Section 1.d.). There also was a report that there were additional, prolonged detentions of Sudanese non-political prisoners during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

Arbitrary arrest and detention are problems. The Penal Code stipulates that detainees may be held for a maximum of 30 days without being charged with a crime. In practice the authorities sometimes detain persons suspected of crimes for much longer periods. The Government held a number of pretrial detainees during the year. The Government continued to detain a small number of Ethiopians during the year; however, the majority were prisoners who were convicted of common crimes.

In July the Government arrested without charge Semere Kessete, the president of the independent Asmara University Students' Association; he remained in detention at year's end. Some observers believe he was arrested for leading student opposition against the Government's requirement that university students participate in a summer work program (see Section 6.c.). Many university students subsequently refused to participate in the summer work program to protest the arrest. The Government retaliated by detaining approximately 450 university students and ordering the others to report for the work program. Approximately 2,000 students of a university student population of approximately 3,300 students complied with the Government's order. The detained students were sent to a work program under harsher conditions than the original program. The students were taken to Wia where temperatures routinely exceed 113 degrees Fahrenheit. There were reports that the student detainees were not given adequate food, water, or shelter at Wia. The male students were held at a military facility with no shelter from the sun. At least two students died from heat-related causes. The students completed the work program in late September and early October and were permitted to return to classes. However, the president of the student association remained in detention without charge at year's end.

In 2000 a journalist for the independent newspaper Tsigenai was arrested and detained without charge. He reportedly remained in detention at year's end. In September the Government shut down the independent press and arrested a number of journalist, editors, and publishers (see Section 2.a.). Approximately nine journalists and editors from independent newspapers, who were not able to flee the country, were arrested. At year's end, they remained in detention without charge and were denied access to visitors.

In September and October, at least two members of a group of elders who tried to mediate between the President and political dissidents were arrested. In July police dispersed a demonstration by villagers from a town near Asmara over land distribution issues and arrested the demonstrators (see Section 2.b.).

In September the Government arrested and detained incommunicado 11 senior PFDJ and National Assembly members, including former Cabinet ministers and army generals, who were part of the "Group of 15," after they expressed political opinions critical of the Government. The detainees were not charged; however, their whereabouts remained unknown at year's end. In addition to these arrests, in September the Government began arresting other individuals, most of them with known ties to political dissidents, and detained them without charge and without access to visitors. The Government continued to make such arrests sporadically through the end of the year. It was estimated that a total of 80 political detainees had been arrested by year's end.

On October 11, authorities arrested two Eritrean citizens who were employed at a foreign embassy in the country and detained them without charges. The detainees remained in custody without charge and were denied visitors at year's end.

An unknown number of persons suspected of association with the Ethiopian Mengistu regime, radical Islamic elements, or suspected terrorist organizations remained in detention without charge, in some cases for years. There were unconfirmed reports that the Government continued to hold numerous members of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), an armed opposition group. Authorities sometimes arbitrarily arrested and detained former combatants or members of the PFDJ who violated an unwritten code of conduct (see Section 1.e.).

Approximately four members of Jehovah's Witnesses remained in detention without charge for failing to participate in national service. Some have been detained for more than 5 years without charge (see Section 2.c.).

Approximately 14 Sudanese remained in detention at year's end. Officials from the Government of Sudan reportedly were denied access to these prisoners. There was no additional information available on the detainees at year's end.

The few deportees of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia who cannot demonstrate their ties to Eritrea have been issued documents that identify them as Ethiopians, which permit them to stay in the country (see Section 2.d.). Government and army officials who routinely check the identification cards of citizens in order to find draft evaders and deserters reportedly consider these Ethiopian deportees to be Eritreans who are trying to avoid national service. As a result, they are subjected to harassment and detention while the authorities check their status. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that authorities arrested Ethiopians for raising the Ethiopian flag in public places.

During the year, the Government deployed military police in Asmara to find deserters and draft evaders (see Section 1.a., 1.c., and 1.f.). The military police detained persons who had not completed the national service requirement (see Section 6.c.). Unlike in the previous year, there were no known reports that military police detained persons with physical or mental disabilities during the year. Those who were deemed unfit for military training by a military medical board were released; the others were required to fulfill their national service obligations. In some instances, authorities arrested and detained for hours individuals who had proper documentation showing they had completed or were exempt from national service while the military police checked their stories.

An unknown but believed to be small number of Ethiopians, particularly men, are believed to be held in police stations, prisons, and jails in Asmara and possibly in other areas. The Government stated that Ethiopians detained in such places were in detention because they had committed a crime or legal infraction. International monitors have access to the majority of detainees in police stations and jails.

In 2000 the Government detained between 10,000 and 20,000 Ethiopians, many of whom were repatriated or deported to Ethiopia. In 2000 the Government established detention camps for Ethiopians scheduled for repatriation or deportation in a number of areas, including Wia, Sheib, Alla, Afabet, Megarih, Shiketi, and Wekert. Monitors who visited the camps at Afabet, Adi Abieto, and Alla reported that conditions in the camps were Spartan but generally adequate; however, there were reports that numerous detainees became sick due to camp conditions at Afabet, and that some died. There were credible reports that at least some of these detainees were forced to work outside their camps (see Section 6.c.). By the end of 2000, the Government reported that most of the camps were closed; however, 1,500 detainees remained at Afabet, and 150 Ethiopians who did not want to leave the country remained at Alla. In mid-January the Government closed the Ethiopian detention center in Afabet, leaving open only the center at Alla, where 50 Ethiopians continued to reside. In July the Government closed the Alla camp and permitted the 50 detainees to live in Asmara, although some are believed to have left voluntarily.

There was no further information available on the several members of the Kunama ethnic group who were detained without charges on suspicion of collaborating with Ethiopian forces in 2000.

In 2000 authorities detained eight journalists; six of the detainees were released within 1 week of detention, but two reportedly were inducted into the military to fulfill their national service obligations and reportedly remained in the army at year's end.

The Government generally does not use exile as a means of political control, and the law has no provisions concerning exile. The Government continued to repatriate Ethiopians to Ethiopia during the year. By mid-August the Government had repatriated more than 21,000 Ethiopians to Ethiopia; however, all of these persons were repatriated voluntarily and with ICRC participation (see Section 2.d.).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The judiciary is formally independent; however, it is weak and subject to executive interference. The continued use of an executive special court system allowed ongoing executive interference with the judicial process. In addition the judiciary relies on the Ministry of Justice for logistical and budgetary support, which further limits the judiciary's independence. On August 7, the Minister of Justice fired the president of the High Court after he publicly complained of executive interference with the High Court.

The judicial system has three parts: civilian, military, and special courts. The civilian court system consists of village courts, subregional courts, regional courts, and the High Court, which also serves as an appellate court. The developing judicial system suffers from a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure that, in practice, limit the State's ability to grant accused persons a speedy trial. However, the judicial system has functioned with few delays, due in large part to a low crime rate, relatively few civil cases, and a culture of informal dispute resolution. Although 16 new courthouses were completed in 1998, further development of the judicial infrastructure was constrained due to the conflict with Ethiopia. At independence the Government chose to retain the Ethiopian legal system but made some modifications to it. The Government has developed new commercial, penal, and criminal codes, which remained ready for ratification by the National Assembly, although ratification had not occurred by year's end. A new civil code was drafted during the year; however, it was not enacted by year's end.

Under the legal system, minor infractions are brought to village courts and subregional courts. More serious offenses are argued before regional courts, and cases involving murder, rape, and other serious felonies are heard by the High Court. All cases except those argued before the High Court are heard by a single judge; on the High Court, panels of three judges hear cases.

Defendants have access to legal counsel, usually at their own expense. Although there is no formal public defender's office, the Government has requested successfully that attorneys work without fee to represent defendants accused of serious crimes punishable by more than 10 years in prison, who are unable to afford legal counsel. Defendants may appeal verdicts to a High Court panel, which is composed of the High Court president and four other judges.

Since the population is largely rural, most citizens only have contact with the legal system through the traditional village courts. Village judges, who are appointed by a panel composed of heads of regional courts, the regional prosecutor, and the regional governor, hear civil cases. Magistrates versed in criminal law hear criminal cases. Many local issues—for example, property disputes and most petty crimes—are adjudicated by local elders according to customary law. Where both litigants are Muslims, civil cases are heard under Shari'a law. The traditional courts cannot impose sentences involving physical punishment. The Ministry of Justice also offers training in alternative dispute resolution to handle some civil and petty criminal cases.

The drafting of many civilians, including court administrators, defendants, judges, lawyers, and others involved in the legal system, into the national service due to the border conflict with Ethiopia had a significant negative impact on the judiciary. The High Court was reduced from 7 benches to 3 benches, and provincial, zone, and village court personnel were reduced by 40 percent. As a result of these personnel constraints, there were lengthy delays in the processing of cases, particularly at the High Court level. During the year some court personnel were permitted to return to work.

The special court system ostensibly was created to reduce a growing backlog in the civilian court system. However, in practice the special courts, which ban defense counsel and the right of appeal, allow the executive branch to mete out punishment without respect for due process and subject the accused to double jeopardy. Judges in the special courts are senior military officers, most of whom have little or no legal experience. They base their decisions on "conscience," without reference to the law. There is no limitation on punishment. The special courts have jurisdiction over some criminal cases, such as capital offenses, felonies, misdemeanors, cases of tax evasion involving large sums, and cases of embezzlement by senior officials. The office of the Attorney General decides which cases are to be tried by a special court. The Attorney General also may allow the special courts to retry civilian court cases, including those decided by the High Court, thereby subjecting defendants to double jeopardy.

The special courts also handle crimes involving corruption, theft, and misuse of government authority allegedly committed by former members of the EPLF during the war for independence. Senior former fighters and members of the PFDJ often are held to a stringent unwritten code of conduct, and violations of this code are handled by the special courts outside the normal judicial process. Those accused of violating this circle of trust have been arrested and held without formal charge or tried in the special courts (see Section 1.d.).

There were no reports of political prisoners; however, there were reports of persons detained for political reasons (see Section 1.d.).

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

The Government at times infringed on the right to privacy. Under the law, warrants are required in routine searches and seizures, except in cases where authorities believe individuals may attempt to escape or destroy evidence. Warrants also theoretically are required before the Government can monitor mail, telephones, or other means of private communication; however, in practice the Government often does not obtain warrants, and there were reports that the Government monitored some international telephone calls and e-mails. There were unconfirmed reports that members of the PFDJ placed Ethiopians under surveillance. The Government has the authority to ban the import of any foreign publication; however, it has not done so (see Section 2.a.).

In March the Government ceased impeding communication between Eritrean POW's being held in Ethiopia and immediate family members in the country.

There were unconfirmed reports that the Government took land from members of the Kunama ethnic group without compensation and gave it to members of other ethnic groups on the grounds that the land was not being exploited efficiently (see Section 5). In addition the Government failed to compensate foreigners for property seized by the former Dergue regime in Ethiopia or to return that property.

During the year, military police were deployed in Asmara to find deserters and draft evaders. Members of the force carried out frequent document checks and routinely detained persons of military age who had not done their national service (see Sections 1.d. and 6.c.).

In 2000 the Government shut down all businesses in Asmara that belonged to Ethiopians with only a few days' notice; approximately 300 businesses owned by Ethiopians were shut down. The Government gave Ethiopians occupying government-owned housing a 1-month notice to vacate. The Government reportedly also froze some bank accounts and seized some assets belonging to Ethiopians. Some Ethiopians had difficulty renewing business licenses, driving licenses, resident permits, or leases. A significant but unknown number of Ethiopians were fired or lost their jobs because of their nationality; in some cases, this was due to the fact that Ethiopians were working for Ethiopian businessmen who left the country or whose businesses were shut down. Ethiopians generally were able to renew residence permits without difficulty during the year; however, they continued to be unable to obtain business licenses, driving licenses or leases, and many continued to lose their jobs because of their nationality. In most cases, Ethiopian business owners who lost their inventories when their shops were closed down did not receive compensation. These hardships encouraged many Ethiopians to leave the country voluntarily during the year.

During fighting in 2000, Ethiopian forces looted and caused significant damage to a number of Eritrean towns and villages. Among the properties ransacked and looted were mosques and churches, factories, flour mills, health clinics, pharmacies, schools, warehouses, bridges, and the home of government officials.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, beginning in September, the Government stopped respecting these rights.

In September the Government arrested and detained without charge 11 senior PFDI and National Assembly members of the Group of 15, after they expressed dissenting political views (see Section 1.d.). Independent journalists who published these dissenting views also were arrested and held without charge, and all private newspapers were banned. The ban remained in effect at year's end. Although the Government stated that the arrests were not related to the opposition's views, it offered no evidence against them and did not charge them formally. Subsequently, other persons also were arrested arbitrarily and remained in custody without charge at year's end. The Government defended the arrests as necessary on grounds of national security but did not provide an additional explanation.

After September the Government controlled all nonreligious media, including three newspapers, one radio station, one television station, and one of only two newspaper printing presses in the country. There were no private radio or television stations, and after September, there were no private, nonreligious newspapers. The Government has the authority to ban the import of any foreign publication, although it has not done so. The press law forbids the local reprinting of articles from banned publications. The Government continued to restrict the right of the religious media to comment on politics or government policies. In theory nonreligious print media were free to criticize the Government, and until the Government shut down the independent press and arrested many journalists in September, they printed many articles critical of the Government. Nonetheless, criticism tended to be limited and fairly mild, and the media practiced a great deal of self-censorship.

The press law in theory allows individuals to publish newspapers and magazines. Eight independent newspapers were published on a weekly or twice weekly basis in the country. Three independent newspapers, Setit, Kestedebana, and Tsighenai, each had a circulation of 15,000. The smallest publication was Mekalih, with a circulation of 10,000, and the largest was Setit, with a circulation of 20,000. In September the Government closed all of these publications, and there were no independent print media operating in the country, other than religious media, at year's end. Religious media generally do not cover nonreligious news and specifically are prohibited from reporting on politics. Trgta is a progovernment publication of the PFDJ's National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students with a wide circulation. The press law does not allow private

ownership of any broadcast media or foreign influence or ownership of any media. The law requires that all newspapers obtain a license from the Ministry of Information before publication and that all reporters must register with the Ministry.

In previous years and until September, the Government refused to extend the licenses of independent reporters on the grounds that it had not yet determined the qualifications that individuals need to possess to obtain a license to be a reporter. However, in practice reporters were allowed to continue working. The Government also could punish "whosoever insults, abuses, defames, or slanders the Government or one of the constituted legislative, executive, or judicial authorities," and forbid the publication of any subject matter that contravenes general morality.

In previous years and until September, the Government used the libel law to intimidate journalists. The editor-in-chief of the Kastedebana had been charged in seven libel cases; the cases were suspended pending the editor's return from serving a sentence for hard labor for leaving his post without proper leave papers. In 1999 the Government arrested an editor who refused to disclose the address of a reader whose letter to the editor criticized the commercial practices associated with Saudi Airlines operations in the country. He was rearrested briefly in late 1999 for additional questioning, and the Government brought more charges against him, some of which later were dropped. At year's end, the Saudi Airlines case and six other government charges of libel against the editor remained pending; however, trial proceedings were suspended indefinitely when the editor was inducted into the army.

In July the military detained Mathewos Habteab, the editor of the Setit, for leaving his military unit without permission; he was detained for a short period and assigned to a military unit upon release. In September authorities arrested and detained independent journalists without charge and closed the private press after the publication of the views of the Group of 15. The detained journalists included: Yosuf Mohamed Ali, editor-in-chief of Tsigenai; Said Abdulkader, editor-in-chief of Admas; Selayinghes Beyene and Dawit Habetemichael, reporters for Meqaleh; Aaron Berhane, editor-in-chief of Setit; Medhane Haile, editor-in-chief of Keste Debona; Emanuel Asrat and Wedi Ade from Zemen; and an independent photographer, Seyum Fesehayee.

In previous years and until September, some journalists claimed that they were targeted unfairly for the draft and complained of routine harassment by unknown individuals who they believe work for the Government. These journalists also alleged that they received threatening telephone calls and that unidentified individuals showed up at their offices and threatened them.

Access to the Internet remained available, and there were four Internet Service Providers in the country. There were no restrictions on the use of the Internet. One independent newspaper began posting editions on the Internet during the year until the newspaper was shut down in September.

Although the Government claims that there were no restrictions on academic freedom, the University of Asmara refused to give diplomas to students who completed their studies unless they completed national service obligations (see Section 6.c.). In July the Government arrested the president of the University's student association for protesting the requirement that university students participate in a summer work program (see Sections 1.d. and 6.c.). In addition new graduates occasionally were pressured to work for government entities. Students were sent to active duty or military training.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly; however, in practice the Government limited this right on at least two occasions during the year. The Government requires a permit from the Ministry of Local Governments for a public meeting or demonstration. There were no reports of any political demonstrations that were not sponsored by the ruling party; no other permits were applied for during the year. However, in one instance a group of respected elders, who sought to mediate between the President and the political dissidents, were informed that they could not meet because they did not have a permit. Several of these elders later were arrested and were in detention without charge at year's end (see Section 1.d.). In July villagers from a town near Asmara called a meeting over land distribution issues; it was unknown whether police used force to disperse the meeting.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association and states that every citizen shall have the right to form organizations for political, social, economic, and cultural ends; however, in practice the Government restricted this right. The Government does not allow the formation of any political parties; however, in 2000 the Government established two committees to develop guidelines and rules for new elections and the formation of political parties, and these committees completed their work during the year. At year's end, public debate on the draft laws was ongoing; such debate is required prior to submission of the draft laws to the provisional National Assembly for amendment and ratification. The Government has stated its opposition to the formation of any party based on ethnicity or religion.

In 1999 journalists from the country's 11 independent newspapers formed an organizing committee to establish an independent journalists' organization. In October 1999, they filed for a license with the Ministry of Local Government; however, the Government refused to issue a license and the organization had not been formed by year's end.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricted this right in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice any religion and to "manifest such

practice," and Islam and most forms of Christianity are practiced and tolerated widely throughout the country with persons free to worship at the church or mosque of their choice; however, the Government continued to harass, detain, and discriminate against members of the small community of Jehovah's Witnesses because of their refusal, on religious grounds, to vote in the referendum on independence or to perform national service.

There have been some complaints in the Muslim community that the Government has discriminated against Islam in favor of Orthodox Christianity, granting Orthodox churches tax relief not offered to mosques.

The Government does not require religious groups to register; however, because the Government owns all land, any religious organization that seeks facilities for worship other than private homes must seek government approval to build such facilities. There were no reports that the Government refused to approve the use or construction of facilities by any religious organization. Religious organizations, including religious nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), do not receive duty-free privileges, although they sometimes are allowed to import items under the reduced duty structure used for corporations. The Government prohibits political activity by religious groups, and the Government's Directorate of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Local Government monitors religious compliance with this proscription against political activity.

Jehovah's Witnesses have several churches and members are not barred from meeting in private homes; however, the Government continued to harass, detain, and discriminate against members of the small community of Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1994 in accordance with a presidential decree, the Government revoked the trading licenses of some members of Jehovah's Witnesses and dismissed most of those who worked in the civil service. This governmental action resulted in economic, employment, and travel difficulties for many members of Jehovah's Witnesses, especially former civil servants and businessmen. In April 1997, the Government labor office issued a form to all employers in Asmara and the surrounding area requesting information on any government personnel who were members of Jehovah's Witnesses. In addition to these measures, members of Jehovah's Witnesses also often are denied identification cards, passports, exit visas, trading licenses, and government housing unless they hide their religion.

Most members of Jehovah's Witnesses have refused on religious grounds to participate in national service or to vote. This has led to widespread criticism that members of Jehovah's Witnesses collectively were shirking their civic duties. Some Muslims also have objected to universal national service because of the requirement that women perform military duty. The Government does not excuse individuals who object to national service for religious reasons or reasons of conscience, nor does the Government allow alternative service. Although persons from other religious groups, including Muslims, reportedly have been punished in past years for failure to participate in national service, only members of Jehovah's Witnesses have been subject to dismissal from the civil service, had their trading licenses revoked, been evicted from government-owned housing, and been denied passports, identity cards, and exit visas. However, there were no reports that Jehovah's Witnesses who performed national service and participated in the national independence referendum were subject to discrimination.

There were no reports that Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested during the year. In the past, several members of Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested for failure to comply with the national service law and some were tried, although there is no information available regarding the verdicts or sentences in these cases. At year's end, approximately four Jehovah's Witnesses remained in detention without charge and without being tried for failing to participate in national service. These individuals have been detained for varying periods of time, some for more than 5 years without charge. The maximum penalty for refusing to perform national service is only 3 years' imprisonment. Ministry of Justice officials denied that any members of Jehovah's Witnesses were being held without charge; however, they acknowledged that some members of Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as a number of Muslims, were serving sentences for convictions on charges of evading national service.

The army resorted to various forms of extreme physical punishment to force objectors, including some members of Jehovah's Witnesses, to do their military service (see Section 1.c.).

According to officials in the Religious Affairs Office, the Government is expected to allow religious schools to operate independently as long as they adhere to a standard curriculum.

In a 1995 proclamation, the Government described specific guidelines on the role of religion and religiously affiliated NGO's in development and government, stating that development, politics, and public administration are the sole responsibility of the Government and citizens. The proclamation bans religious organizations from involvement in politics and restricts the right of religious media to comment on political matters.

Pursuant to the proclamation, religious organizations are permitted to fund, but not initiate or implement, development projects. However, this proclamation never has been enforced in practice—several religious organizations have executed small-scale development projects without government interference.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights; however, while citizens can travel freely within the country and change their place of residence and work, authorities restrict freedom of movement and emigration in practice. The Government requires all citizens to carry national identification cards, which they must present on demand at security checkpoints. The Government restricted travel to some areas within the country for security reasons.

Military police periodically set up roadblocks in Asmara and other cities to find draft evaders and military deserters (see Section 1.d.). Although the number of such roadblocks was reduced significantly from the

previous year, periodic crackdowns continued to occur during the year.

The Government continued to restrict travel along much of the border with Sudan. Some areas remain heavily mined, a legacy of the war for independence, and occasionally new mines are set by the EIS or others, leading to additional travel restrictions (see Sections 1.a. and 1.c.).

Citizens largely are free to travel outside the country after obtaining an exit visa, although members of Jehovah's Witnesses (see Section 2.c.), officials of the former Ethiopian military regime, and those who have not completed national service have been denied passports or exit visas. In addition the Government often refused to issue exit visas to some adolescents, apparently on the ground that they were approaching the age of eligibility for national service. During the year, the Government restricted the issuance of exit visas to citizens between the ages of 18 and 40 who had not completed their national service obligations (see Section 6.c.).

In general citizens have the right to return; however, citizens must show proof that they paid a 2 percent tax on their annual income to the Government while living abroad to be eligible for government services upon their return to the country. Applications to return from citizens living abroad who have run afoul of the law, contracted a serious contagious disease, or been declared ineligible for political asylum by other governments, are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Unlike in the previous year, Ethiopians generally were able to renew residence permits without difficulty; however, they were subject to detention when stopped by authorities with an expired residence permit (see Section 1.d.). Ethiopians were able to obtain exit visas without difficulty and often were encouraged by the Government to obtain them.

During the year, the Government repatriated more than 21,836 Ethiopians from the country to Ethiopia. All of those who left the country were repatriated voluntarily and with ICRC participation. An estimated 20,000 to 25,000 Ethiopians remained in the country at year's end.

In 2000 the Government repatriated or deported more than 25,000 Ethiopians to Ethiopia. Among the deportees were women who alleged that they were prevented from taking their children with them because their fathers were Eritreans. In 2000 the Government deported 800 Ethiopians from the Keren camp without ICRC participation. The Government stated publicly on several occasions that it had not adopted a policy of deporting all Ethiopian nationals from the country. After August 2000, forced, mass deportations stopped after the end of the war with Ethiopia.

The border with Ethiopia was closed in 1998 due to the outbreak of war, although Eritreans deported from Ethiopia crossed the border and were allowed to resettle in the country. As many as 75,000 Eritreans or Ethiopians of Eritrean origin were deported from Ethiopia. The deportees, if they wished, were placed in villages with friends or family. Those who no longer had connections in Eritrea were placed temporarily in camps with IDP's before being settled among the general population. To facilitate the deportees' integration into society, the Government provided them with documentation that was valid for 6 months and identified them as deportees. If, during that time, the deportees could find three Eritrean witnesses willing to testify to their Eritrean ties, the Government issued them documentation of Eritrean nationality and considered them to be permanent citizens. For the small minority of deportees who could not demonstrate Eritrean ties, the Government granted them identity documents that specified that they were Ethiopian but permitted them to stay in the country. At times these deportees were subjected to harassment and detention by military authorities (see Section 1.d.). Deportees of military age who acknowledged Eritrean nationality were ordered to report for military service.

In 2000 approximately 1.1 million citizens were displaced internally as a result of the conflict with Ethiopia. Most of these IDP's returned home; however, approximately 70,000 IDP's remained in 11 camps in the Debub and Gash-Barka zones at year's end. Camp facilities were basic, but conditions generally were adequate. There also was a large but unknown number of IDP's residing outside camps during the year.

On June 27, Ethiopia repatriated 723 Eritreans to the country without notifying the ICRC in advance.

The law provides for the granting of refugee and asylee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government cooperates with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Government provides first asylum and provided it to Somali and Sudanese refugees during the year. There were 731 Sudanese refugees at the Elitte camp in the western part of the country and 1,253 Somali refugees at the Emkala camp, near the port of Massawa. The Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC), a government agency, is the principal organization responsible for refugee and problems of the internally displaced.

Between May and the end of the year, 32,648 of the estimated 151,000 long-term Eritrean refugees in Sudan were repatriated under the auspices of the UNHCR. Another 32,000 of these refugees have registered for repatriation with the UNHCR.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

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

Although the Constitution provides for this right, citizens have not been able to change their government in multiparty elections. Authority within the Government is held very narrowly among a small group of former fighters. The Government is dominated completely by the PFDJ, which came to power in the 1993 popular referendum in which more than 99.8 percent of voters chose an independent country managed by a transitional government run by the PFDJ rather than electing to remain part of Ethiopia. The PFDJ still has not fulfilled the ambitious program that it initially outlined for a transition to a democratically elected government by 1997. Elections, originally scheduled for 1997, never have been held. The only authorized political party is the PFDJ, and there are no opposition parties active domestically (see Section 2.b.). In 2000, the Government established two committees to develop guidelines and rules for new elections and the formation of political parties, and these committees completed their work in March and April; however, the drafts later were modified. The draft electoral law and the draft law regulating the formation and activities of political parties were the subject of ongoing public discussions under the Government's auspices during the year. National Assembly elections were scheduled for December; however, the elections did not take place by year's end. Government officials stated that the elections were delayed because of continuing tensions with Ethiopia and problems caused by dissidents and the private press.

The percentage of women in government or politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population. In an effort to encourage broader participation by women in politics, the PFDJ named 3 women to the party's 19-member Executive Council and 11 women to the 75-member Central Council at the last party congress that was held in 1994. Women participated in the Constitutional Commission (occupying almost half of the positions on the 50-person committee) and hold several senior government positions, including the positions of Minister of Justice and Minister of Labor. By law one-third of regional National Assembly seats are reserved for women, and women also are able to compete for the non-reserved seats.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Local Governments jointly are responsible for handling human rights inquiries. All NGO's must register with the ERREC; there were 34 international and 14 domestic NGO's operating in the country, the majority of which are involved in emergency assistance. Only one domestic human rights organization, Citizens for Peace in Eritrea (CPE), is allowed to operate in the country, and its work is limited to advocacy on behalf of war victims. In 2000 the CPE issued a statement appealing to citizens and the Government to safeguard the human right of Ethiopians living in the country.

A Government proclamation that religious organizations, including religious-based NGO's, could not engage in development activities never has been enforced in practice. In addition the four main religious groups (Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant) continue to coordinate the provision of relief services to deportees from Ethiopia in conjunction with the ERREC. A governmental proclamation requiring that all private NGO's hire only those who have completed their national service never has been enforced in practice.

Most international human rights organizations are not permitted to operate within the country, with the exception of the ICRC, which continued its programs during the year and provided shelter and supplemental food to approximately 100,000 persons who were displaced by the conflict with Ethiopia (see Section 2.d.). The ICRC also visited prisons and detention centers during the year (see Section 1.c.).

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution and the transitional civil code prohibit discrimination against women and persons with disabilities, and the Government enforces these provisions.

Women

The Government has not taken a firm public stance against domestic violence and generally has ignored the problem; however, violence against women is pervasive. Spousal abuse is a crime. Spousal abuse, especially wife beating, is common; however, domestic violence seldom is discussed openly by women because of societal pressures. Such incidents more commonly are addressed, if at all, within families or by religious clergy. It was estimated that more than 65 percent of women in the Asmara area were the victims of domestic violence during the year. The Government response to domestic violence was hindered by a lack of training, inadequate funding, and societal attitudes.

Rape is a crime. However, no specific information was available on its prevalence in the country.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), which is condemned widely by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, is widespread, with estimates placing the number of women and girls who have been subjected to FGM at 95 percent. FGM is practiced by almost all ethnic and religious groups in the country. In the lowlands, infibulation—the most severe form of FGM—is practiced. There is no law prohibiting FGM. However, the Government has worked to combat the practice of FGM. The Government and other organizations, including the National Union of Eritrean Women, sponsor education programs that discourage the practice. The U.N. Population Fund, through the Ministry of Health, sponsors reproductive health projects that provide training and awareness programs that focus on the negative physical and psychological impacts of FGM.

The Government consistently has advocated improving the status of women, many of whom played a

significant role as fighters in the struggle for independence. Since independence, women have enjoyed a legal right to equal educational opportunities, equal pay for equal work, and legal sanctions against domestic violence. Much of society remains traditional and patriarchal, and generally women do not enjoy a social status equal to men. The law provides a framework for improving the status of women, but laws are implemented unevenly, because of a lack of capacity in the legal system and ingrained cultural attitudes. In practice males retain privileged access to education, employment, and control of economic resources, with more disparities in rural areas than in cities.

The law requires that women between the ages of 18 and 40 participate in the active national service program (see Section 6.c.). During the year, the Government transferred more women out of direct combat roles and reassigned them to other responsibilities, including training and operation of heavy equipment.

When the Government began detaining and returning Ethiopians to Ethiopia in 2000, authorities singled out young Ethiopian women, particularly prostitutes, barmaids, and waitresses, for detention and involuntary deportation; reportedly this was due, in part, to the fear that these women spread HIV/AIDS. Prostitution is illegal. As a result of displacement and difficult economic conditions, prostitution has become a serious problem in the country. Reportedly those women who could demonstrate that they had a child with an Eritrean father were permitted to remain in the country. However, other female deportees alleged that they were prevented from taking their children because the fathers were Eritreans.

Children

The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare is responsible for government policies concerning the rights and welfare of children. The Children's Affairs Division under the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare covers childcare, counseling, and probation. The law criminalizes child prostitution, pornography, and sexual exploitation.

Education through grade seven is compulsory and free. However, education above grade seven is neither free nor compulsory, and while the situation has improved, there is a shortage of schools and teachers at all levels. According to the Ministry of Education, only 37 to 38 percent of children attend school. Approximately 75 percent of the population is illiterate. In rural areas, young girls usually leave school early to work at home.

Child abuse is not thought to be common.

FGM is performed on approximately 95 percent of all girls (see Section 5, Women).

Child labor occurs (see Section 6.d.). A small number of children under the age of 18 entered military service, usually because of a lack of a birth certificate or other identification. When soldiers were found to be under the age of 18, they were removed from service.

Persons with Disabilities

The long war for independence and the conflict with Ethiopia left thousands of men and women with physical disabilities from injuries they received as guerrillas, soldiers, and civilian victims. The Government spends a large share of its resources to support and train these fighters, who are regarded as heroes, and does not discriminate against them in training, education, or employment. There are no laws mandating access for persons with disabilities to public thoroughfares or public or private buildings; however, many newly constructed buildings provide access for persons with disabilities.

Religious Minorities

Societal attitudes toward members of Jehovah's Witnesses are the exception to a widespread religious tolerance. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses generally are disliked and face some societal discrimination because of their refusal to participate in the independence referendum in 1993 and to perform national service, a refusal that is seen widely as unpatriotic. However, the level of societal discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses has declined in recent years.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There were reports of government and societal discrimination against the Kunama, one of nine ethnic groups in the country, and which are concentrated primarily in the west. Because of the existence of a Kunama opposition group operating in Ethiopia and supported by the Ethiopian Government, some Kunama in the country are suspected of supporting or having sympathies with the Ethiopian Government. There were unconfirmed reports that the Government took land from members of the Kunama ethnic group without compensation and gave it to members of other ethnic groups on the grounds that the land was not being efficiently exploited. There also was an unconfirmed report that Eritrean refugees returning from Sudan were resettled in the Kunama crop fields after evicting the native Kunama. There is some societal discrimination against Kunamas due to the fact that they are seen, ethnically and culturally, as different from the majority of Eritreans.

In 2000 approximately 200 Kunamas were detained without charges on suspicion of collaborating with the Ethiopian forces (see Section 1.d.).

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

Some government policies restrict free association or prevent the formation of unions, including within the civil service, the military, the police, and other essential services. The Ministry of Labor must grant special approval for groups of 20 or fewer persons seeking to form a union. There were no reports that the Government opposed the formation of any labor associations during the year.

Proclamation 8 provides workers with the legal right to form unions and to strike to protect their interests. The National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW), which was part of the EPLF during the war, maintains a close affiliation with the Government, and its leadership consists of high-ranking PFDJ members. The NCEW represents more than 25,000 workers from 250 unions and receives some assistance from the International Labor Organization (ILO) and foreign labor organizations. The largest union within the NCEW is the Textile, Leather, and Shoe Federation. There were no strikes reported during the year.

Unions may affiliate internationally, and all five workers' federations within the NCEW maintained affiliations with international unions during the year.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Under the new labor code, which was ratified on November 15, a tripartite board composed of workers, employers, and Ministry of Labor officials is required to resolve differences. Under the labor law in force during the year, disputes were taken to court. During the year, the NCEW brought 54 cases to court, while an additional 17 NCEW cases remained pending. By August, 20 of the 71 cases were settled through agreements between the parties, 11 were settled through the Ministry of Labor, and 3 were adjudicated.

There are no export processing zones. A free trade zone, which included the ports of Massawa and Assab, was being established at year's end.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor; however, there were unconfirmed reports that it occurred during the year. All citizens between the ages of 18 and 40 are required to participate in the National Service Program, which includes military training as well as civic action programs. In addition some national service inductees have been released back to their civilian jobs, while nominally kept in the military, because their skills are deemed critical to the functioning of the Government or the economy. These individuals are required to forfeit to the Government earnings in excess of the national service salary and also are required to perform farm labor. High school students also are required to participate in a paid summer work program.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that Ethiopian civilian detainees were forced to perform paid farm labor and road repair.

During the year, the Government announced that university students were required to participate in a paid summer work program for 1 month or would be ineligible to continue their studies. This requirement was first imposed on university students in 1999 but suspended in 2000 because of the war. The students objected to the work program, in part because many students must work during the summer to earn the money needed for their academic and living costs, which are approximately \$200-\$300 (2,700-41,000 Nakfa) per year. The students objected that the Government's payment of approximately \$78 (1,050 Nakfa), out of which the students would have to pay their food, lodging, travel, and other expenses, was insufficient. The Government arrested the president of the Asmara University Students' Association because of his opposition to this policy, and many students who opposed the work program. The Government required others to report for the program. The students were later sent to coastal areas to perform road work under conditions of extreme heat.

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor by children, and there were no reports that it occurred.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The legal minimum age for employment is 18 years, although apprentices may be hired at age 14. The law also prohibits apprentices under 18 years of age from performing certain dangerous and abusive labor, such as working in mines or sewers. Labor inspectors in the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare are responsible for the enforcement of laws pertaining to the employment of children; however, due to the small number of inspectors, inspections are infrequent. According to the Ministry of Education, only 37 to 38 percent of children attend school due, in part, to a shortage of schools and teachers. It is common for rural children who do not attend classes to work on family farms, fetching firewood and water, and herding livestock among other activities. In urban areas, some children work as street vendors of cigarettes, newspapers, or chewing gum. Children also work as child-minders, traders, and in small-scale manufacturing. There were reports that the Government inadvertently employed children under the age of 18 as soldiers (see Section 5).

The Government has not ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including that performed by children, and there were no reports that it occurred.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There are two systems that regulate employment conditions—the civil service system and the labor law system. There is no legally mandated minimum wage in the private sector. In the civil service sector, wages vary from \$24 to \$288 (320 to 3,800 Nakfa) per month, with factory workers in government-owned enterprises earning the highest wages. The minimum wage in the civil service sector does not provide the average worker and family with a decent standard of living.

The standard workweek is 44 1/2 hours, but many persons work fewer hours. Under the Labor Law, workers are entitled to one day of rest per week, and most workers are allowed 1 to 1 1/2 days off per week. The Government has instituted occupational health and safety standards, but inspection and enforcement vary widely among factories. Workers are permitted to remove themselves from dangerous work sites without retaliation.

Foreign and Eritrean workers are treated equally under the law.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons; however, there were no reports that such trafficking occurred to, from, or within the country.

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