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Ethiopia: The Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (UDJ); its formation, leadership, structure, mandate, membership, issuance of membership cards; treatment by authorities; branches outside of Ethiopia; membership requirements at Toronto and Atlanta branches (2008-2012)

1. Unity for Democracy and Justice Party in Ethiopia

1.1 Formation

The Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (UDJ or UDJP), commonly known as Andinet [also spelled Andnet and Andenet], the Amharic word for unity (Ethiomeia 19 June 2008), was formed in June 2008 in Addis Ababa (ibid.; AP 20 June 2008; *Sudan Tribune* 16 Sept. 2008). According to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, it was formally registered on 22 August 2008 (Ethiopia [2010]).

The UDJ was formed after the dissolution of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD, also known as Kinijit) (*The Reporter* 26 July 2008; *Sudan Tribune* 16 Sept. 2008), which had been the main opposition alliance in Ethiopia (ibid.; AP 20 June 2008). Sources indicate that many UDJ members were former members of the CUD (ibid.; *Sudan Tribune* 16 Sept. 2008). The UDJ's first chairperson, Birtukan Mideksa [also spelled Midekssa] (Ethiomeia 19 June 2008; AP 20 June 2008), had been the vice-chairperson of the CUD (*The Reporter* 26 July 2008; AllAfrica 31 Dec. 2008).

1.2 Leadership and Presence in Ethiopia

Birtukan Mideksa, who had been imprisoned by the government of Ethiopia between December 2008 and October 2010 (Human Rights Watch 6 Oct. 2010), resigned from politics in early 2011 (VOA 20 Feb. 2011; *Addis Voice* 28 Jan. 2011). In December 2011, the former president of Ethiopia, Negasso Gidada [also spelled Giddada], was elected party chair (VOA 11 Dec. 2011; *The Reporter* 17 Dec. 2011).

According to the official website of the UDJ, the party is governed by its National Executive Committee, which "oversees the overall direction of the party and the policy-making process through a rolling program of policy development... setting strategic objectives on an annual basis and meeting regularly to review the work of the party" (UDJ [2012]). It lists the National Executive Committee's members as:

Dr Negas Gidada, Chairman

Ato Girma Seifu, Vice Chairman

Ato Zeleke Radi, Organizational Affairs Standing Committee Chair

Dr Hailu Arraya, Public Relations Standing Committee Chair

Ato Tekele Bekele, Finance Affairs Standing Committee Chair

Ato Tmesegen Zewdie, Foreign Relations Standing Committee Chair

Ato Mulat Tassew, Political Affairs Standing Committee Chair

Ato Wondwossen Tsegaye, Economy Affairs Standing Committee Chair

Ato Semeles Habete, Social Affairs Standing Committee Chair

Ato Demessie Mengistu, Legal and Human Rights Affairs Standing Committee Chair

Ato Asetat Tassie, General Secretary. (ibid.)

Sources indicate that the UDJ won a single seat in parliament in the May 2010 elections (Reuters 31 May 2010; ANAASO 6 July 2012). The successful candidate, Girma Seifu, reportedly represents the Mercato district of Addis Ababa (Reuters 31 May 2010).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Chairman of the Andinet North America Association of Support Organizations (ANAASO), which coordinates the North American Andinet chapters, stated that there are local UDJ offices at the zonal and district levels all over Ethiopia and that the head office is in Addis Ababa (6 July 2012). An article by the Addis Ababa-based newspaper *The Reporter* dated 20 June 2009 stated that 58 branch offices had been opened across the country and that an additional 59 were planned. The same article reported that the party had approximately 40,000 members (*The Reporter* 20 June 2009).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of Unity for Human Rights and Democracy Toronto (Andinet Toronto), an affiliate of the UDJ, stated that the UDJ headquarters are located in District 10 of Lideta sub-city in Addis Ababa (8 July 2012).

1.3 Mandate and Membership

According to its website, the UDJ's "essential economic and political objectives" are to ensure the respect of democratic values and human rights; to build a free market based economy; as well as a social security system; to establish a rule of law abiding judiciary; to promote accountability and transparency in the administration; to protect the rights of vulnerable people facing social exclusion; to lead a process of national reconciliation; and to establish productive foreign relations (UDJ n.d.a). The stated objectives are to be accomplished by "tak[ing] power in... national and regional free and fair elections" (ibid.). The Andinet website also states that the UDJ's long-term goal is "to serve the nation and the people of Ethiopia" (UDJ n.d.b). Its short-term objective is "to support all activities and efforts for the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners from [state] prison" (ibid.).

Sources indicate that the UDJ is a multi-ethnic party (Reuters 26 Nov. 2009; AllAfrica 15 Dec. 2009; ANAASO 6 July 2012). An article published by Reuters News, adds that although Ethiopian political parties have traditionally been ethnically based, the leaders of the UDJ represent three of the most prominent ethnic groups in the country (26 Nov. 2009). Sources report that UDJ leaders do not condone the use of violence (*Sudan Tribune* 16 Sept. 2008; VOA 11 Dec. 2011; Ethiomedia 23Mar. 2012).

The ANAASO chairman explained that the UDJ is a "multinational, very tolerant, centrist party" and that the only requirement for becoming a member is "being Ethiopian" (6 July 2012). He added that a prospective member would fill in an application at a local office and pay a membership fee (ANAASO 6 July 2012). He also indicated that the UDJ in Ethiopia does not issue membership cards (*ibid.*). In contrast, the representative of Andinet Toronto stated that Andinet Ethiopia does issue membership cards because, as a political party, they are required by Ethiopian law to do so (8 July 2012). He also noted that membership to political parties is regulated by the Constitution and other Ethiopian laws, as well as the regulations of the party itself (Andinet Toronto 8 July 2012).

According to the ANAASO chairman, the activities of the UDJ in Ethiopia include holding public discussions and seminars on democracy and human rights; raising awareness of the differences between the current government's policies and those of the UDJ; and publishing a weekly newsletter (6 July 2012).

1.4 Alliances

In 2009, eight opposition parties, including the UDJ, united to form a political alliance in the lead-up to the May 2010 elections (Global Insight 12 Oct. 2009; *Sudan Tribune* 11 Sept. 2009). The coalition, called Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia [commonly known as Medrek; also known as the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum and the Forum for Justice and Democratic Dialogue], was reported to be the country's largest opposition group (AllAfrica 4 May 2010). According to one source, the UDJ is the largest party in the Medrek coalition (VOA 15 Nov. 2011). Medrek, which had a total of 80 elected representatives between 2005 and 2010 (*Sudan Tribune* 11 Sept. 2009), put forward over 400 candidates in the 2010 elections (VOA 15 Nov. 2011; ANAASO 6 July 2012) and won one seat (Reuters 31 May 2010; Economist Intelligence Unit 1 Jan. 2011).

In January 2011, the Economist Intelligence Unit reported that the UDJ had announced its intention to merge with a former CUD party, the All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) (*ibid.*). Also in January 2011, the *Reporter* indicated that the UDJ announced a planned merger with the Berhan for Unity and Democracy Party (BUDP), a multi-ethnic party (20 Jan. 2011). The merger was reportedly finalized in December 2011 (*The Reporter* 17 Dec. 2011).

1.5 Treatment of Members by Authorities

In December 2008, party leader Birtukan Mideksa was arrested and detained by the authorities (AllAfrica 31 Dec. 2008; *The Sudan Tribune* 3 Jan. 2009). She had previously been arrested in 2005, along with over 100 opposition members, and sentenced to life imprisonment (*ibid.*; AllAfrica 31 Dec. 2008; see also AP 20 June 2008), after protesting

the results of the 2005 elections (*Sudan Tribune* 3 Jan. 2009; Human Rights Watch 6 Oct. 2010). She and other opposition leaders had been officially pardoned and released in 2007 (*Sudan Tribune* 3 Jan. 2009; Human Rights Watch 6 Oct. 2010). Her re-arrest in 2008 and the reinstatement of her life sentence reportedly occurred because she had denied having asked for a pardon from the government (*Sudan Tribune* 3 Jan. 2009; VOA 16 Apr. 2009; AFP 14 May 2009). She was released in October 2010 (Human Rights Watch 6 Oct. 2010; *The Guardian* 7 Oct. 2010).

Human Rights Watch reports that, according to the UN, Birtukan's detention was "arbitrary" and "in violation of international law" (6 Oct. 2010). Sources also indicate that she was held in solitary confinement (*The Guardian* 7 Oct. 2010; Reuters 16 Apr. 2009). According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*, her solitary confinement lasted until June 2010, despite a court ruling that found her constitutional rights to have been violated by such treatment (8 Apr. 2011, Sec. 1e). Sources also report that non- family members were denied access to her, although she was legally entitled to visits from friends and lawyers (US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 1e; Reuters 27 Mar. 2010).

Media sources report that in 2009 and 2010, the UDJ contested the fairness of the electoral process and the political climate (AFP 14 May 2009; *The Reporter* 20 June 2009; Reuters 3 Nov. 2009). For example, party leaders stated that some of their branch offices had been shut down by the authorities (AFP 14 May 2009; *The Reporter* 20 June 2009; US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 3). UDJ leaders also reported that authorities had warned citizens against renting meeting spaces to the party (*The Reporter* 20 June 2009). In corroboration, *Country Reports 2009* states that opposition parties were reportedly unable to rent meeting halls because the government had threatened hall owners against doing so (US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 2b). Sources have also reported on arrests of opposition members (ibid., Sec. 3; AFP 14 May 2009; Reuters 3 Nov. 2009). According to the deputy leader of the party in November 2009, the arrests and detentions of opposition members were a strategy used by the government to prevent them from running in the elections (ibid.). Citing unidentified opposition leaders, the *Sudan Tribune* reported in September 2009 that opposition candidates were "being intimidated or arrested on false charges" and that their regional offices were being closed (11 Sept. 2009).

In September 2011, the Ethiopian authorities arrested Andualem Aragie, the vice-chairperson of the UDJ, along with two other UDJ leaders and journalist Eskinder Nega, on allegations of terrorism (Human Rights Watch 16 Sept. 2011; AI 19 Sept. 2011). The arrested UDJ members were reportedly prohibited from receiving visitors, including family, doctors, and priests (*The Reporter* 29 Oct. 2011). Sources report that Andualem

was attacked by his cellmate and sustained serious head injuries (VOA 19 Feb. 2012; *The Reporter* 25 Feb. 2012). The attacker, reportedly serving a life sentence for murder (VOA 19 Feb. 2012), was then moved into a cell with another UDJ leader (ibid.; *The Reporter* 25 Feb. 2012).

In June 2012, 24 Ethiopians, including Andualem, another UDJ leader, and Eskinder, were convicted of terrorism (AFP 27 June 2012; AI 27 June 2012). Sources indicate that they were targeted for their political activities (ibid.; VOA 19 Feb. 2012; Human Rights Watch 16 Sept. 2011). For example, the journalist Eskinder Nega had reportedly attended a meeting on press freedom at UDJ headquarters days prior to his arrest (VOA 19 Feb. 2012). Both Eskinder and Andualem were reported to have criticized the government's practice of arresting journalists and opposition members for terrorism (Human Rights Watch 16 Sept. 2011). Amnesty International (AI) reports that evidence brought against Eskinder and Andualem included public speeches they had made advocating peaceful protest against the government, and is of the opinion that Eskinder and Andualem are "prisoners of conscience [who were] convicted because of their legitimate and peaceful activities" (27 June 2012). Similarly, *Country Reports 2011* states that "observers found the evidence presented at trials to be either open to interpretation or indicative of acts of a political nature rather than linked to terrorism" (24 May 2012, Sec. 1.e).

Sources report that, in a speech to parliament in October 2011, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi affirmed that the journalists and opposition members who had been arrested, as well as some who had not yet been arrested, were guilty, stating that "[w]e know in our hearts that they are involved in terrorism acts" (*The Reporter* 29 Oct. 2011; AI Dec. 2011, 23). A documentary aired on state television in Autumn 2011 reportedly accused the UDJ of having ties to terrorist organizations (*The Reporter* 3 Dec. 2011; VOA 11 Dec. 2011). Sources indicate that the program identified specific individuals by name as perpetrators of terrorist acts (ibid.; *The Reporter* 4 Jan. 2012).

2. International Branches

2.1 Relationship to the UDJ in Ethiopia

Both the Andinet Toronto representative and the ANAASO chairman explained that international chapters of the UDJ are not formal members of the Ethiopian political party, but rather, supporters or sympathizers of it (Andinet Toronto 8 July 2012; ANAASO 6 July 2012). The ANAASO chairman stated that US chapters do not support the UDJ exclusively, working instead to promote the broad goal of achieving democracy and the protection of human rights in Ethiopia (6 July 2012). Similarly, the Andinet Toronto representative writes that "Andinet Toronto is not intended to promote any specific goal

or party" but that it shares with the UDJ in Ethiopia "a common dream of seeing an Ethiopia where people have their basic human rights respected" (8 July 2012).

According to the Andinet Toronto representative, Andinet chapters exist in Europe, Canada, the United States, Asia, and Australia, and the largest group is located in the Washington, DC area (8 July 2012).

2.2. American Chapters, including activities and membership

Information in the following two paragraphs was provided to the Research Directorate by the Chairman of the ANAASO on 6 July 2012. The ANAASO oversees all of the North American chapters and has its headquarters in Washington, DC; however, each individual Andinet chapter elects its own officials and manages its own program. The chapters may raise funds for the UDJ in Ethiopia - for example, to support Andualem Aragie's family and provide him with necessities as he serves his life sentence. Chapters may also participate in advocacy activities in the US, campaigning against the Ethiopian government and for the protection of human rights in general. Some members with a specific academic or technical expertise may provide advice or be consulted by UDJ headquarters in Ethiopia.

Andinet chapters may hold or attend public events where they recruit new members; although members may also be recruited on an individual basis. Chapter members do not have to be a member of the UDJ party in Ethiopia; anyone with an interest in democracy and human rights in Ethiopia is welcome. Monthly membership fees are determined by each individual chapter, sometimes in accordance with local regulations. In Boston, for example, the membership fee is US\$ 20 per month. Individual chapters have different levels of activity, according to their funding and size. The most active branches are located in Washington, Atlanta, Boston, and Dallas. The Boston chapter does not issue membership cards; however, it could write a letter confirming membership upon request.

According to the ANAASO website, there are also Andinet Support Groups in Chicago, Denver, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Minnesota, Nashville, North Carolina, New York, Oakland, Phoenix, San Jose, Seattle, South Dakota, and Upstate New York (ANAASO n.d.a). On the ANAASO website, visitors can donate funds to assist with party chairperson Negasso Gidada's medical expenses (ANAASO n.d.b).

2.2.1 Atlanta Chapter

In September 2011, the Andinet-Atlanta Support Group issued a press release calling for the release of Andualem Aragie and other individuals arrested and accused of terrorism

(15 Sept. 2011). An article published on online news source Ethiomedia.com reports that in March 2012, a senior leader of the UDJ in Ethiopia, Seeye Abarha, spoke at a public event organized by Andinet Atlanta, with proceeds from the event funding the work of the UDJ executive body (23 Mar. 2012). Additional information on Andinet Atlanta, including on membership requirements, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.3 Andinet Toronto and other Canadian Chapters, including activities and membership

According to its website, Andinet Toronto is a "volunteer based, not for profit community organization, striving to empower Ethiopian-Canadians to advocate for Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance in Ethiopia" (n.d.). Its stated objectives are to:

1. Raise awareness about the current political, economic and social problems in Ethiopia to the Canadian public, policy makers and government, and advocate for democracy and human rights.
2. Cooperate with like-minded groups and organizations to promote the development of democracy, human rights, free press, good governance, free market and national unity.
3. Raise funds from individuals, corporations and philanthropic organizations to financially support victims of political repression, political prisoners or their families and promote the cause of democracy and human rights.
4. Organize symposiums, workshops, and conferences and encourage social and cultural activities that would promote the common historical and cultural heritage of all people of Ethiopian descent. (Andinet Toronto n.d.)

The information in the following three paragraphs was provided by the representative of Andinet Toronto on 8 July 2012. Andinet Toronto, which is a registered NGO in Ontario, coordinates the other Canadian chapters of Andinet, located in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Ottawa, in addition to its own work. The Toronto and Vancouver branches are particularly active. There is "functional solidarity and ideological unity (i.e. liberalism)" between all Andinet chapters, but each one is established and functions independently. However, Andinet Toronto exchanges information with other chapters and with the UDJ in Ethiopia on "victims of political harassment," and collaborates with "likeminded" chapters in North America on various activities. It also sends delegates to Washington, DC for annual meetings and other meetings on the political situation in Ethiopia.

Andinet Toronto does not issue membership cards, as it does not have the financial resources to do so. However, it keeps records of its members and volunteers, along with their contributions and relevant activities, and can issue referral letters if necessary.

Volunteers under threat or requiring protection may "make a request for a certain form of confirmation [of] their membership or affiliation" to Andinet Toronto.

Andinet Toronto's activities include: demonstrations and protests against human rights violations; participation in campaigns for the release of political prisoners; candlelit vigils for victims of human rights violations; the production of human rights reports; lobbying Canadian policymakers; and fundraisers. Members are not required to belong to any political party; rather, membership is open to "any person who understands and condemns the current political oppression and repression in Ethiopia and wants to contribute to bring about democratic change."

On its website, Andinet Toronto states that it is accepting donations for emergency medical treatment for party chairperson Negasso Gidada (n.d.). The website also provides information on some activities coordinated by Andinet Toronto, including: a gala dinner in August 2009 dedicated to Birtukan Mideksa (31 Aug. 2009); a protest in June 2010 against the presence of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Toronto at the G20 summit (24 June 2010); and a letter to the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs in September 2011 regarding the arrest of opposition members for terrorism (17 Sept. 2011). It also indicates that in April 2010, Andinet Vancouver members met with a Canadian Member of Parliament and a Member of Legislative Assembly about Birtukan Mideksa and human rights in Ethiopia (11 Apr. 2010).

2.4 Treatment of ex-patriot Ethiopians by the Government of Ethiopia

According to the ANAASO chairman, ex-patriots returning to Ethiopia would "definitely" be monitored by the Ethiopian authorities (6 July 2012). He noted that the government puts a lot of resources into surveillance of the population, including through wiretapping and the Internet, and that it has agents in every town in the country, allowing the government to remain informed about citizens' movements (ANAASO 6 July 2012). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the representative of Andinet Toronto, there is "strong evidence to suggest that anyone who is actively involved in Ethiopia[n] politics while in [the] Diaspora is subject to scrutiny and probably harassment when he or she travels to Ethiopia" (8 July 2012). The representative noted his organization is aware of many cases of ex-patriots being detained upon arrival at the airport, interrogated, and "intimidated" by security (Andinet Toronto 8 July 2012). He added that some people suspected of having political objectives or of being anti-government can be detained at the airport and sent to jail or threatened with charges of terrorism (ibid.). In other cases, "when the political costs of detention are higher for the government, individuals are deprived of business or

investment opportunities as retaliation for their involvement in ... opposition politics" (ibid.). He explained that Ethiopians who live abroad try to conceal their political affiliations or memberships to any international Andinet chapter when going to Ethiopia, in order to draw less attention to themselves (ibid.).

The representative stated that an Ethiopian-Canadian member of Andinet Toronto went to Ethiopia in December 2011 and was questioned for several hours at the airport. He was also interrogated by security agents at his home the next day, regarding his purpose for travelling and his activities in Canada, and was followed by local officials for the duration of his visit (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A UDJ member and candidate in the 2010 elections is reported to have stopped active political work after the election due to "severe harassment" during the campaign, and later fled to and received refugee status in Sudan (AI Dec. 2011, 17-18). Amnesty International and the Andinet Toronto representative state that he was kidnapped by Ethiopian forces in Sudan and returned to Ethiopia, where he was one of the 24 people charged with terrorism in September 2011 (ibid., 18) and later found guilty (Andinet Toronto 8 July 2012).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: Representatives of Andinet Seattle and Andinet Atlanta could not provide information within the time constraints of this Response. Attempts to contact representatives of Andinet Vancouver, Andinet Los Angeles, and the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party in Ethiopia were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: Addis Fortune; ECADF Ethiopian News; Ethiopian News Agency; *Ethiopian Review*; EthioPolitics; Europa World Online; Freedom House; *The Toronto Star*.

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