

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	260
Land:	Etiopien
Kilde:	IRIN
Titel:	Ethiopia's Muslim protests
Udgivet:	15. november 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	21. december 2015

Last Updated: Thursday, 10 December 2015, 08:57 GMT

- [Русский](#)
- [English](#)



-
- [UNHCR](#)
 - [Country Positions](#)
 - [Policies and Positions](#)
 - [Thematic Guidelines](#)
 -
 - [News](#)
 - [Statistics and Operational Data](#)
 - [Research](#)
 - [Website](#)
- [Laws](#)
 - [1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)
 - [1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)
 - [1969 OAU Refugee Convention](#)
 - [Cartagena Declaration on Refugees](#)
 - [EU acquis](#)
 - [National Legislation](#)
 - [Statelessness / Nationality](#)
 - [1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons](#)
 - [1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness](#)
 - [Nationality law](#)
- [Jurisprudence](#)
 - [Case Law](#)
 - [Court Interventions](#)
- [Country Information](#)
 - [Country News](#)
 - [Country Profiles](#)
 - [Country Reports](#)
 - [Maps](#)
- [Browse by](#)
 - [A-Z Index](#)
 - [Document Type](#)
 - [Publisher](#)
 - [Topic](#)
 -
 - [Categories](#)
 - [Country Information](#)
 - [Legal Information](#)
 - [Policy Documents](#)
 - [Reference Documents](#)
- [Resources](#)

- [External Links](#)
 - [Information Alerts](#)
 - [Protection Starter Kit](#)
 - [Standards and Training](#)
 - [Refworld Personalization](#)
 - [UNOG Library](#)
-
- [My Profile](#)

Log in

☐ Remember Me

[Forgot password?](#) [Register](#)
-
- [Email this document](#)
 - [Printable version](#)

Ethiopia's Muslim protests

Publisher [Integrated Regional Information Networks \(IRIN\)](#)

Publication Date 15 November 2012

Cite as Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), *Ethiopia's Muslim protests*, 15 November 2012, available at:
<http://www.refworld.org/docid/50a6484a2.html> [accessed 10 December 2015]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Tensions have been simmering over several months between Muslims and the government, with thousands holding demonstrations in protest at the government's alleged interference in religious affairs; the government has blamed the protests on a small group of extremists.

Around 60 percent of Ethiopia's 84 million people are Christians; Muslims make up about one-third of the population, according to official figures. Religion-related clashes have been rare in the country, but unrest over the past several months has led to several deaths and dozens of arrests. IRIN looks at the causes of, and fallout from, the protests.

What sparked the protests?

The leaders of the protests, which began in December 2011, accuse the Ethiopian government of trying to impose the al-Ahbash Islamic sect on the country's Muslim community, which traditionally practises the Sufi form of Islam. Al-Ahbash beliefs are an interpretation of Islam combining elements of Sunni Islam and Sufism; its teachings are popular in Lebanon. Said to be first taught by Ethiopian scholar Abdullah al-Harari, the Ethiopian Al-Ahbash teachings are moderate, advocating Islamic pluralism, while opposing political activism.

In December 2011, the state moved to dismiss the administration of the Awoliya religious school in Addis Ababa. In July, police dispersed an overnight meeting at the school on the eve of an African Union heads of state summit, and arrested several protesters and organizers of the

meeting, which police officials said did not have a permit.

Those behind the meeting, an "Arbitration Committee" of 17 led by prominent religious scholars, said they wanted to dialogue with the government but insisted they would continue legitimate protests to oppose its continued interference in the administration of the religious school and the election of members of the country's supreme Islamic Council.

They accuse the government of dictating elections to the council, which concluded on 5 November, and favour the Al-Ahbash Muslim sect.

Temam Ababulga, a lawyer representing activists who led the protests - some of them are currently behind bars - says they are appealing to a federal court to cancel the election and its outcome, on the grounds that the elections were not conducted in accordance with the council's by-laws.

"The opposition to Ahbash at this time is not theological... the protesters oppose... that the regime is sponsoring the movement, providing finance, logistical support and allowing it to use both the Islamic Council and the state institution in its proselytization," said Jawar Mohammed, an Ethiopian analyst now studying at Columbia University in the USA.

"Ahbash has been in Ethiopia since the 1990s and has peacefully coexisted with the rest of Islamic revival movements," he added. "The confrontation came only after the government invited the leading figures from Lebanon and started aggressive re-indoctrination campaign."

What is the government's response?

The government denies that it is violating the country's constitution by meddling in religious affairs. Addressing parliament on 16 October, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn said: "The government is not and would not interfere in the affairs of any religion in the country."

At the height of the protests in mid-April, then Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who died in August, told parliament that "a few extremists are working to erode the age-old tradition of tolerance between traditional Sufi Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia," and stressed that they would not be tolerated by the government.

"The government... has made a number of efforts to encourage engagement with the protesters and has, for example, also done all it can to support the matter of elections for the Islamic Council," said a statement by the government in response to Amnesty International's allegations.

"It is true that some members of a 'protesters committee' have been arrested following violent protests, but it is completely misleading to suggest that this 'committee' had been 'chosen to represent the Muslim community's grievances to the government'. This 'committee' was not chosen nor elected by anyone... It was, in sum, a small, self-appointed committee of protesters whose support in the community at large, as the recent election clearly demonstrated, was minimal."

Increasing Islamic militancy in the region - Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania have all witnessed increased Islamist activity - is of concern to the Ethiopian authorities, who say they are facing growing threats evident from the discovery of the first Al-Qaeda cell in the country; 11 people have been in an on-going trial, suspected of being members of an Al-Qaeda cell and accused of planning terrorist attacks.

What are rights groups saying?

The USA has added its voice to accusations that Ethiopia has been interfering in the religious affairs of its Islamic population and wrongfully arresting people. Addis Ababa has on several occasions rejected these charges.

"Since July 2011, the Ethiopian government has sought to force a change in the sect of Islam practiced nationwide and has punished clergy and laity who have resisted," an 8 November press statement by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom - a bipartisan federal government body - said. "Muslims throughout Ethiopia have been arrested during peaceful protests."

Amnesty International has also accused the Ethiopian authorities of "committing human rights violations in response to the ongoing Muslim protest movement in the country". The organization said the police was using "excessive force" against peaceful demonstrators.

Human Rights Watch says it is deeply concerned that Ethiopia's government has repeatedly used terrorism-related prosecutions to clamp down on lawful freedom of speech and assembly.

"Many of these trials have been politically motivated and marred by serious due process violations," Laetitia Bader, a Human Rights Watch researcher on Ethiopia, told IRIN via email. "The Muslim leaders and others, should be immediately released unless the government can produce credible evidence of unlawful activity. The fact that many of the detainees have been in detention for over three months without charge does raise questions about the existence of such evidence."

Rights groups also say journalists covering the protests are being increasingly harassed. In October, police briefly detained Marthe Van Der Wolf, a reporter with the Voice of America as she was covering one of the protests at the Anwar Mosque, and according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), told to erase her recorded interviews.

"Ethiopian authorities should halt their harassment of journalists covering the country's Muslim community and their intimidation of citizens who have tried to speak to reporters about sensitive religious, ethnic, and political issues," CPJ said in an October statement.

The government denies violently suppressing the protests, and says "one or two of the protests were extremely violent (with police killed)."

Activists and rights groups are concerned about references to "terrorism" in the charges. "The charges contain similar allegations used to prosecute dissident journalists and opposition leaders in the past few years... the leaders of the Muslim protest are just the latest victims of the regime's war against dissenting voices," said Jawar Mohammed.

"In fact, many of the Muslim scholars and spiritual leaders being accused of such conspiracy to create an Islamic state have written and publicly spoken advocating against any form of extremism, emphasizing that Ethiopia is a multi-faith country where secular state is indispensable for co-existence," he added. "The irony is that these Muslim leaders, many of them, are followers of the Sufi tradition and have a proven track record of actively fighting against infiltration of the community by extremist elements."

What is the extent of the protests and violence?

The demonstrations have continued for close to a year, and show no signs of abating. During Eid Al Adha celebrations in late October, tens of thousands of Muslims took to the streets to celebrate

the holiday; after the prayers, they staged protests. "We have nothing to kill for... but we have Islam to die for," read some of the protesters' banners.

The arrest of an Imam in the Oromia region back in April led to clashes that left four dead, while the country's federal police clashed with protesters at Addis Ababa's Grand Anwar mosque on 21 July.

In October, in the Amhara Region, three civilians and one police officer were killed when protesters stormed a police station where a religious leader was jailed, said Communication Affairs State Minister Shimeles Kemal. On 29 October, federal prosecutors charged the jailed activists and others with terrorism; a group of 29 people are accused of aiming to establish an Islamic state, undermining the country's secular constitution.

How might resentments play out?

In a [report](#) released shortly after Meles's death, the think tank International Crisis Group warned that the new government would find it difficult to deal with grievances in the absence of "any meaningful domestic political opposition".

"Resentments would likely continue to be turned into ethnic and religious channels, thus undermining stability and, in the worst case of civil war, even survival of a multi-ethnic, multi-faith state," the authors said.

Search Refworld

by keyword
 and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Ethiopia](#)

Topics

- [Freedom of religion](#)
- [Good governance](#)
- [Muslim](#)
- [Sufi](#)

-
-
-
-
-

© UNHCR 2015

[Partners](#)

[Help](#)

[Contact](#)

[Site Map](#)

-
-
-
-

[About](#)
[Accessibility](#)
[Disclaimer](#)
[Privacy](#)