



ETHIOPIA (19)

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ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia continued its transition from a unitary to a federal system of government. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi leads the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (GFDRE), which was elected in 1995 to replace a transitional government established in the aftermath of a long and brutal civil war. Most opposition groups boycotted the elections. Candidates affiliated with the dominant party within the transitional government, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), won a landslide victory in national and regional elections. Although observers judged the elections to be generally free and fair, they cited irregularities. Officials affiliated with the dominant coalition, the EPRDF, control the Government, and the principal faction within the EPRDF remains Prime Minister Meles' Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF). Federal regions, largely organized along ethnic lines, increasingly are autonomous and have a large degree of local control over fiscal and political issues. However, the relationship between the central Government and local officials and among various judiciaries lacks consistent coordination and occasionally actions are taken at the local level that conflict with stated federal policy. A long history of highly centralized authority, great poverty, civil conflict, and unfamiliarity with democratic concepts combine to complicate the implementation of federalism. The federal Government's ability to protect constitutional rights at the local level is limited and uneven. Local administrative, police, and judicial systems remain weak throughout the country. The judiciary is weak and overburdened, but continued to show signs of independence.

Military forces that had been assigned to help police and local militia in the Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz regions establish order, control banditry, and curtail rebel activities were redeployed to areas bordering Eritrea. Without the military's assistance, these areas once again have experienced a breakdown in law and order. There was increased internal military presence in some parts of the Somali region and Oromiya. Armed conflict between the military forces of Ethiopia and Eritrea along contested border areas resumed in February. In addition, military forces conducted an increased number of low-level operations against the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Somalia-based Al'Itihad terrorist organization, and elements of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) both in the country and in southern Somalia and northern Kenya. The national police organization is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice. Some local officials and members of the security forces committed human rights abuses.

The economy is based on smallholder agriculture, with more than 85 percent of the estimated population of 61.7 million living in rural areas under very basic conditions. Agriculture accounts for approximately 80 percent of total employment. Per capita gross national product (GNP) is estimated at \$130 per year. Real GNP growth was 2 to 3 percent. Total exports declined 18 percent to \$494 million. The decline was due to a drop in the export value of coffee. Coffee accounted for 70 percent of the value of 1998 exports and 60 percent of 1999 exports. The conflict with Eritrea has led to increased military spending. Military spending during the year was estimated to be \$350 million. The Government continued to implement an economic reform program designed to stabilize the country's financial position, promote private sector participation in the economy, and attract foreign investment. In December the customs authority introduced a 10 percent surtax on most imports to raise funds for the war effort.

The Government's human rights record generally was poor; although there were improvements in a few areas, serious problems remain. Security forces committed a

number of extrajudicial killings. In November security forces killed up to 10 persons in Sodo while suppressing widespread riots and demonstrations in protest of the imposition of a new language as a medium of instruction in schools. Security forces at times beat and mistreated detainees, and arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens. Prison conditions are poor, and prolonged pretrial detention remains a problem. The Government continued to detain persons suspected of sympathizing with or being involved with the OLF. The Government continued to detain and deport without due process Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin. Since the outbreak of the border conflict in May 1998, more than 67,000 such persons have left Ethiopia for Eritrea; the vast majority were deported, although a small number left voluntarily. Another 1,200 male Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin are being held in internment camps. Although prompted by national security considerations, the expulsions and detentions raised fundamental concerns regarding arbitrary arrest and detention, forced exile, the forcible separation of families, and nationality issues, as well as the hardships and financial losses suffered by those who were detained or expelled. The judiciary lacks sufficient trained staff and funds, which limits its ability to provide citizens the full protection provided for in the Constitution. The Government continued to train additional civil and criminal judges and assigned them to regional courts. The Supreme Court reduced the number of judges required to hear a simple civil proceeding from three to one, thereby speeding up the provision of justice. The Government infringes on citizen's privacy rights, and the law regarding search warrants is widely ignored.

The Government restricts freedom of the press and continued to detain or imprison members of the press; however, fewer journalists were detained than in previous years. At year's end, eight journalists remained in detention, three of whom were charged with alleged involvement with terrorist activities. Approximately 45 journalists obtained bail during the year but still are subject to trial. Most were accused or convicted of inciting ethnic hatred, committing libel, or publishing false information in violation of the 1992 Press Law. Nevertheless, the private press is active and flourishing. Although the Government has not banned formally any newspaper or publication, the publication of some journals remains suspended due to the detention of editorial staff, and journalists continued to practice self-censorship. The Government at times restricted freedom of assembly. Despite Ministry of Education assurances to the contrary, the independent Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA) was not permitted to organize seminars in the regions. The Government limits freedom of association; however, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) registration process, which is slow and tedious, continued to improve. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) was registered after a 7-year effort, and the organization won a suit against the Government for blocking its bank accounts; however, the Government continues to refuse the registration of some NGO's. The Human Rights League (HRL), which was founded in 1997 by prominent Oromo civic leaders, has not been permitted to register, and its office records and equipment, confiscated by the Government in 1998, have not been returned. In June ETA secretary general Dr. Taye Woldesemayat was convicted and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for treason. Four codefendants were given prison sentences ranging from 8 to 13 years. The sentences were much more severe than expected.

While in general the Government respects freedom of religion, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right. The Government restricted freedom of movement. In August Eritreans residing in Ethiopia and those Ethiopians of Eritrean origin who voted in the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence were required to register with the SIRAA and issued 6-month residence permits. There were reports of the forced return of Djiboutian Afars who were not permitted to register as refugees. The border conflict with Eritrea, along with drought conditions in some areas, have displaced a large number of persons internally.

Violence and societal discrimination against women, and abuse of children remained problems, and female genital mutilation (FGM) is widespread. The National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE) reported in September 1998 that FGM occurs in 72.7 percent of the female population, down from 90 percent in 1990. The Government supports efforts to eliminate FGM and other harmful traditional practices;

however, such practices are widespread. The exploitation of children for economic and sexual purposes remained a problem. There are approximately 150,000 street children in urban areas, and their number is growing daily. Societal discrimination against disabled persons was a problem. Discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities persists. Child labor was a pervasive problem. Forced labor was also a problem, and there were some reports of trafficking in persons.

The Government's Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) continued conducting the trials of persons accused of committing crimes under the brutal Marxist regime (1974-91) of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Charges have been brought against 5,198 persons. All have been indicted and arraigned, and the testimony of victims continues to be heard in open court. However, more than half of those accused are not in custody and were charged in absentia. Most SPO detainees have been held in custody for 7 or 8 years awaiting trial and judgment.

After extensive public consultations the House of People's Representatives (HPR) in October passed enabling legislation to meet the constitutional requirement to create a human rights commission and office of the ombudsman. The commission has full powers to receive and investigate all complaints of human rights violations made against any person. Neither entity was operational by year's end.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

The security forces committed a number of extrajudicial killings. In June a youth attending the funeral of All Amhara People's Organization (AAPPO) founder Dr. Asrat Woldeyes was shot and killed by an undercover security officer who subsequently was arrested and charged for the crime. There were reports that in August security forces fired on a group of Somalis who were protesting the military's occupation of a Somali border town, killing two persons. There also were unconfirmed reports of extrajudicial killings by Government security forces from Oromiya and the Somali region.

Actions taken by the Government as part of the border conflict resulted in some civilian deaths. In February an Ethiopian plane bombed the Eritrean village of Laili Deda, killing at least five Eritrean civilians and wounding several others. There were reports that in April Ethiopian forces shelled the border town of Adi Keyih, killing at least eight Eritrean civilians and wounding dozens of others.

The Government announced a no-fly zone along its northern border soon after its military conflict with Eritrea began in May 1998. In August air defense forces shot down an unarmed civilian Learjet en route to South Africa from Italy when it violated the no-fly zone, killing two European nationals.

In November student protests against the arrest of two teachers who criticized new textbooks in the Welayita speaking sections of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region State (SNNPRS) led to widespread demonstrations and riots (see Sections 1.d. and 5). Special police units called in to suppress the riot killed up to 10 persons and wounded many others.

In March a 70-year old man accused of involvement with OLF terrorist activities died in prison (see Section 1.c.). In June Kebede Desta, a defendant charged along with 127 others for genocide (see Section 1.d.), died in prison of multiple chronic illnesses. Also in June, ETA acting secretary general Shimelis Zewidie died the same month of tuberculosis. Many international labor observers and ETA officials claim that Shimelis Zewidie's medical condition was exacerbated by a 75-day detention in late 1998.

The Government provided financial support to a coalition of Eritrean opposition groups based in Sudan, which laid landmines in Eritrea that resulted in several civilian deaths.

The outbreak of hostilities with Eritrea has led to Eritrean support of armed opposition groups that have been attempting to overthrow the Ethiopian Government. This has led to an increase during the year in armed attacks within Ethiopian territory by these groups operating mostly out of Somalia and Kenya. These attacks took the form of landmine incidents and hit-and-run attacks by guerrillas armed with small arms and grenades. In response the Government conducted military incursions into Somalia and around Kenya against these armed opposition groups. Some civilians and combatants were killed as a result of these attacks and in confrontations between government forces and the guerrillas, although the total number of deaths could not be confirmed.

In 1997 the federal High Court in Addis Ababa began the arraignment and prosecution of 5,198 persons formally charged with genocide and other war crimes, including extrajudicial killings, under the previous regime. Of the 5,198 persons charged, 2,246 were in detention, while the remaining 2,952 were charged in absentia. At year's end, witnesses still were being heard and evidence taken in the ongoing trials. In November the federal High Court handed down a death sentence in absentia to Getachew Tebeka, a former district governor and army lieutenant. Terba was convicted of ordering the detention, torture, and execution of five alleged opponents of the Derg Government, and is the first SPO defendant to receive the death penalty.

According to U.N. officials, Eritrean forces planted more than 50,000 landmines in the Badme area during their occupation of the territory. At least 10 civilians were killed by landmine explosions while attempting to return to their homes in the area.

In August and November, landmines derailed railroad engines pulling passenger trains outside Dira Dawa, killing at least four persons and injuring several others. Observers believe that the landmines were set by the radical Islamic group Al'Ittihad.

Banditry remained a serious problem in parts of the country. Bandits, often heavily armed, killed civilians, police, and soldiers during robberies and attempted robberies. Most evidence suggests that their motives primarily were economic.

There were unconfirmed reports that in November Eritrean forces killed 17 Ethiopian Afar civilians during a cross border attack. b. Disappearance

There were no confirmed reports of disappearances perpetrated by the Government, although both domestic and international human rights groups claim that there were many politically motivated disappearances.

In 1997 the federal High Court in Addis Ababa began the arraignment and prosecution of 5,198 persons charged with genocide and other war crimes under the previous regime, including the disappearance of 14,209 persons (see Section 1.a.).

In January a foreign aid worker was kidnapped in the Somali region by unknown persons and taken to Somalia where he was released unharmed. In April unknown gunmen reportedly kidnapped three persons, including a foreign aid worker, in the Ogaden region.

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

The Constitution prohibits the use of torture and mistreatment; however, there were credible reports that security officials sometimes beat or mistreated detainees. Government media published occasional reports of officials who were jailed or dismissed for abuse of authority and violations of human rights.

In November police injured many persons and killed up to 10 others while suppressing riots in the SNNPRS (see Sections 1.a., 1.d. and 5).

There was an increase during the year in armed attacks within Ethiopian territory by Eritrean-supported opposition groups operating mostly out of Somalia and Kenya (see Section 1.a.). These attacks have taken the form of landmine incidents and hit-and-run attacks by guerrillas armed with small arms weapons and grenades.

Prison conditions are poor and overcrowding remains a serious problem. Prisoners often are allocated fewer than 21.5 square feet of sleeping space in a room that may contain up to 200 persons. Prison food is inadequate, and many prisoners have food delivered to them every day by family members or use their own funds to purchase food from local vendors. Prison conditions are unsanitary, and access to medical care is not reliable. Prisoners typically are permitted daily access to prison yards, which often include working farms, mechanical shops, and rudimentary libraries. Visitors are permitted. Prison letters all must be written in Amharic, making outside contact difficult for non-Amharic speakers; however, this restriction is not enforced. Female prisoners are housed separately from men, and rape does not appear to be a problem.

Several prisoners and detainees died during the year due to illness and disease (see Sections 1.a. and 1.d.).

In May six detainees suspected of involvement in terrorist activities staged a 10-day hunger strike to protest the prison policy of keeping them in handcuffs 24 hours a day (see Section 1.d.). Another 3-day prison wide hunger strike in protest of prolonged court proceedings took place in Kaliti prison in June.

The army used military camps located near Zewaye Goba in Bale zone, Oromiya for the temporary detention and interrogation of OLF fighters and alleged supporters.

In June approximately 1,200 internees of Eritrean origin and 172 prisoners of war were moved from the Bilate detention camp to the Dedesa internment camp in western Oromiya. The new camp is in an area less prone to malaria. In July approximately 350 Eritrean prisoners of war (POW's) were moved from the Tigray region to the Dedesa internment camp.

The Government permits independent monitoring of prison conditions and police stations by the ICRC and by diplomatic missions. The ICRC, in general, had access to federal and regional prisons, civilian detention facilities, and police stations throughout the country; however, after a July visit, the Government refused to allow the ICRC access to the Central Investigation Division (CID) detention facility in Addis Ababa, which holds upwards of 200 persons whose cases are under investigation. Furthermore, the ICRC was unable to gain access to police stations in Addis Ababa where ethnic Eritreans are believed to be detained. The ICRC had restricted access to military detention facilities in the east and the southeast, where suspected OLF fighters are held.

The Government generally permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to detention facilities holding Eritrean POW's. The ICRC also regularly visited civilian Eritrean nationals and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin being detained on national security grounds. However, in February the Government instructed ICRC staff to leave the Tigray region. In April ICRC staff were permitted to visit POW's held in Tigray; however, the ICRC was not permitted to resume its program in Tigray until August.

Government authorities permitted diplomats to visit prominent detainees held by the SPO for alleged involvement in war crimes and terrorist activities. These detainees include former Derg housing ministry official and governor of Sidamo, Abera Yemane-Ab, 1968 Olympic marathon winner Mamo Wolde, and former Addis Ababa University President Dr. Alemayehu Tefera. ETA secretary general Dr. Taye Woldeesemayat, now serving a 15-

year sentence for plotting violent insurrection, also is permitted visitors from the diplomatic community.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution and both the criminal and civil codes prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the Government does not always respect these rights in practice.

Under the Criminal Procedure Code, any person detained must be charged and informed of the charges within 48 hours and, in most cases, be offered release on bail. Those persons believed to have committed serious offenses may be detained for 15 days while police conduct an investigation, and for additional 15-day periods while the investigation continues. Some offenses, such as murder and treason, are not bailable. In practice, and especially in the outlying regions, authorities regularly detain persons without a warrant, do not charge them within 48 hours, and--if persons are released on bail--never recall them to court. Thousands of criminal suspects remained in detention without charge, most of whom were accused of involvement in OLF terrorist activities. Often these lengthy detentions are due to the severe shortage and limited training of judges, prosecutors, and attorneys.

Federal and regional authorities arrested and detained persons without charge or trial for activities allegedly in support of armed opposition groups. The vast majority of these incidents took place in the Oromiya and Somali regional states. More than 7,500 persons allegedly associated with armed opposition groups remain in detention. Most detainees were accused of participating in armed actions by the OLF or the ONLF. In typical cases, security forces arrested and held these persons incommunicado for several days or weeks before eventually releasing them. The closed trial of 65 Oromos suspected of involvement in OLF terrorist acts continued. In March one of the Oromo defendants who was 70 years of age died while in jail. In April three other defendants were granted bail. Six of the defendants staged a 10-day hunger strike in May to protest the prison policy of keeping them in handcuffs 24 hours a day.

Thirty-one AAPO officials and supporters, most detained since 1994, were convicted on treason charges in March. They were convicted of inciting an armed uprising and promoting civil war. Four of the individuals, an elderly defendant, two women, and a youth, received 4-year sentences and were released for time served. The remaining 27 received sentences ranging from 5 to 20 years.

In response to attacks by armed opposition groups operating out of Somalia and Kenya (see Sections 1.a. and 1.c.), the Ethiopian military has conducted operations in and around the areas bordering Somalia and Kenya. These operations have resulted in the capture and detention of hundreds of opposition fighters and their suspected supporters on both sides of these borders during the year.

A total of nine journalists were detained during the year, of whom, two remained in prison at year's end because they could not meet bail requirements (see Sections 1.e. and 2.a.). In April Samson Seyoum, the former editor in chief of two now defunct weekly independent newspapers who had been detained since December 1995, was sentenced to 4 1/2 years' imprisonment on charges of incitement to war and attempting to spread Islamic fundamentalism (see Section 2.a.). In May another editor in chief was sentenced to 1 year and 1 month in prison for libel but was released in July for time served (see Section 2.a.).

In December 1997, the trials began of three of the five journalists and editors associated with the opposition newspaper Urjii, who were arrested in October and November 1997 for violating the press law and for alleged involvement in OLF terrorist activities. The arrests of the journalists occurred without warrants, and the detainees were held incommunicado for up to a month. One of the detainees, charged only with violating the press law, was released on bail in December 1998; his trial was pending at year's end. The fifth detainee was convicted of violating the press law and sentenced to a year in prison,

but five other charges still are pending against him (see Section 2.a.).

In December the Government arrested up to 26 Nuer tribal political activists associated with the Gambella People's Democratic Congress (GPDC) (see Sections 3 and 5). Some of the activists were arrested for inciting Nuer students in November to demonstrate for the use of the Nuer language in school (see Section 2.b.), while others were arrested on suspicion of supporting the OLF. All of the activists remained in detention at year's end.

On November 6, police arrested two teachers in Sodo in the SNNPRS for objecting to the use of a new language in student textbooks (see Section 5). Student demonstrations against the arrests led to widespread week-long demonstrations and riots. Special police units brought in to suppress the demonstrations killed up to 10 persons, injured hundreds and arrested up to 1,000 others (see Sections 1.a, 1.c., and 5). A former Young Men's Christian Association camp in Sodo was used as a temporary detention facility for hundreds of demonstrators. At year's end, between 70 and 120 persons remained in detention in prisons in the Sodo area, including several elders from the Welayita community.

In March 1997, the SPO formally charged 128 defendants with politically motivated genocide dating back to the 1976 "red terror." In December 1998, the SPO began presenting prosecution testimony in the case of former Addis Ababa University President Alemayehu Tefera, imprisoned since 1993, although the charges on which he originally had been detained were dropped the same year. His petition to separate his case from the 127 other defendants was denied (see Section 1.a.). The court also started hearing testimony in December 1998 on the case of former Olympic marathon champion Mamo Wolde, who was charged with genocide for the state-sponsored killing of 14 teenagers during the prior regime. Wolde has been detained since 1992. In June the trial of ETA secretary general Dr. Taye Woldesemayet concluded with a conviction for treason and alleged involvement in an underground terrorist organization. He was sentenced to 15 years in jail. In handing down the sentence the court referenced two alleged terrorist acts that had been dropped from the list of charges against Dr. Woldesemayet during the trial. Four other SPO defendants also were convicted and given sentences ranging from 8 to 13 years. The sentences were much more severe than expected. In June another SPO defendant, Kebede Desta, died in prison of multiple chronic illnesses, and ETA acting secretary general Shimelis Zewidie died the same month of tuberculosis (see Sections 1.a. and 1.c.).

Opposition groups allege that some of the persons detained by the SPO, as well as some others, are held for political reasons. The Government denies that it holds persons for political reasons.

In February 39 Eritrean exchange students held in Bilate detention camp since July 1998 were released and flown by chartered aircraft to Asmara, Eritrea.

Civilian residents of Eritrean origin have been detained since the outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Government justified these detentions on grounds of security. Approximately 1,200 civilian residents of Eritrean origin remained detained in internment camps at year's end. There were credible reports that hundreds of others were held in police stations for months prior to being deported. The ICRC was not granted access to detainees allegedly held in police stations. A total of 512 Eritrean POW's captured in fighting between Ethiopia and Eritrea remained detained at year's end. Beginning in April, authorities began releasing Eritrean detainees if they could obtain visas to a country other than Eritrea. Approximately 90 detainees have left Ethiopia, mostly to other African countries, particularly Uganda and Malawi. In early August, 25 Eritrean detainees obtained fraudulent travel documents and left Ethiopia to Malawi on a scheduled airline flight. They were detained in Malawi where they refused an offer of transit to Eritrea. The Malawian authorities then forcibly returned the former detainees to Ethiopia. One former detainee was killed and at least six were wounded in a confrontation with Malawi authorities (see Section 2.d.).

Exile is illegal, and the Constitution provides that citizens shall not be deprived of their nationality against their wills; however, since the outbreak of conflict with Eritrea in May 1998, the Government has detained and deported more than 67,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin on national security grounds. Some of the deportees were voluntary returnees who had requested return to Eritrea; however, the vast majority were deported forcibly. Deportation orders originated from the Security, Immigration, and Refugee Affairs Authority in Addis Ababa. The Government's actions raised serious issues of due process since there were no preliminary hearings to determine the merits of the deportations, no right to counsel was provided to detainees, and detainees only had a very circumscribed opportunity to register protests. In addition, the issue of the nationality of Eritrean-origin Ethiopians has not been settled yet. Heads of households were taken without warning, detained, and often deported via overland routes within 48 hours. Remaining family members were given arbitrary deadlines to sell property and sometimes were subjected to departure taxes based on estimated annual income and unpaid balances on government bank loans. The ICRC monitored most border crossings until September when government notification to the ICRC ceased. Since September 4,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin were deported, reportedly without provision for their safety, hygiene, sanitation, or food. Some of these deportees were hospitalized upon reaching Eritrea. In August all Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin over 18 years of age who had taken part in the 1993 referendum on Eritrean independence were required to register with the Security, Immigration, and Refugee Affairs Authority (SIRAA) and complete residence application forms. After registration, applicants received identity cards and residence permits valid for 6 months (see Section 2.d.).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, the judiciary is weak and overburdened. Although the federal and regional courts continued to show signs of judicial independence, in practice severe shortages of adequately trained personnel in many regions, as well as serious financial constraints, combined to deny many citizens the full protections provided for in the Constitution.

Consistent with the Constitution, the Government continued to decentralize and restructure the judiciary along federal lines with the establishment of courts at the district, zonal, and regional levels. The federal High Court and federal Supreme Court hear and adjudicate original and appeal cases involving federal law, transregional issues, and national security. The regional judiciary is increasingly autonomous, with district (woreda), zonal, high, and supreme courts mirroring the structure of the federal judiciary. The Government has delegated some of the war crimes trials to the supreme courts in the regions where the crimes allegedly were committed.

The Constitution provides legal standing to some preexisting religious and customary courts and gives federal and regional legislatures the authority to recognize other courts. By law, both parties to a dispute must agree before a customary or religious court may hear a case. Shari'a (Islamic) courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims. In addition, some traditional courts still function. Although not sanctioned by law, these courts resolve disputes for the majority of citizens who live in rural areas and who generally have little access to formal judicial systems.

The outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea adversely impacted the military justice system. Most foreign assistance to train officers and noncommissioned officers was suspended at the same time that the rapid expansion of the military greatly increased the need for trained military lawyers and judges. The military's involvement in the detention of opposition fighters and their suspected supporters has constrained further its badly overburdened justice system.

The Constitution provides that persons arrested have the right to be released on bail. In most cases, bail is set between approximately \$125 (1,000 birr) and approximately \$1,250

(10,000 birr). At year's end, two journalists were being held in prison, since they could not meet these bail requirements. Certain offenses such as capital crimes are not bailable.

Authorities detained hundreds of persons without charge for supposed involvement with the OLF and the ONLF (see Section 1.d.). Such cases often reflect arbitrary actions on the part of local officials but also result from an overburdened and cumbersome judicial system marked by a shortage of trained and competent prosecutors and judges.

Regional offices of the federal Ministry of Justice monitor local judicial developments, but the federal judicial presence in the regions is limited. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some local officials interpret decentralization to mean that they no longer are accountable to any higher authority, even within their own regions. For example, local government officials throughout the country ignored instructions from the National Electoral Board (NEB) on the acceptance of candidate endorsement signatures from opposition party candidates.

To remedy the severe lack of experienced staff in the judicial system, the Government continued to identify and train lower court judges and prosecutors, although officials acknowledge that the pay scale offered must be increased significantly to attract the required numbers of competent professionals. Senior government officials charged with judicial oversight estimate that the creation of a truly independent and skilled judicial apparatus would take decades. The Government has welcomed foreign financial and technical assistance to accelerate this process.

Pending passage by regional legislatures of laws particular to their region, all judges are guided exclusively by the federal procedural and substantive codes.

According to the Constitution, accused persons have the right to a public trial by an ordinary court of law within a reasonable time after having been charged. Accused persons have the right to be represented by legal counsel of their choice. However, in practice, lengthy pretrial detention was common, closed proceedings occurred, and at times, detainees were allowed little or no contact with their legal counsel. The Public Defender's Office provides legal counsel to indigent defendants, although its scope remains severely limited, especially with respect to SPO trials. The law does not allow the defense access to prosecutorial evidence before the trial.

The SPO was established in 1992 to create a historical record of the abuses committed during the Mengistu Government and to bring to justice those criminally responsible for human rights violations. The federal High Court has considered the cases of 2,658 defendants accused of genocide, war crimes, and aggravated homicide. Trials began in 1994 and continue; however, the process is subject to frequent and lengthy adjournments. Court appointed attorneys, sometimes with inadequate skills and experience, represent many of the defendants, following claims that they could not afford an adequate defense. Of the 5,198 defendants, the Government is trying 2,952 in absentia, including former dictator Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, who returned to exile in Zimbabwe after a brief visit during the year to South Africa for medical treatment. All the defendants in custody appeared before the court during the year with many defendants charged and tried collectively in each instance. Most cases still were in progress at year's end. No SPO defendant has been released on bail, although 33 defendants have been released for lack of evidence. A number of defendants have been convicted, including Lieutenant Getachew Tekeba, who was sentenced to death in absentia (see Section 1.a.), and Colonel Zeleke Zerihun, who received a 15-year sentence for genocide and crimes against humanity. In July the Minister of Agriculture of the prior regime, Dr. Geremew Debele, received an 8-year sentence on charges related to abusing employees of the central slaughterhouse. The court cleared him of murder charges. He was released for time served but his political rights reportedly are limited for the next 3 years.

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

The law requires judicial search warrants; however, they seldom are obtained outside of Addis Ababa in practice.

There were credible but unconfirmed reports that in certain rural areas local officials used threats of land redistribution to enforce support for the ruling coalition. There also were credible reports that teachers and other government workers have had their employment terminated if they were not of the dominant ethnic group in their region (see Section 5).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution and the 1992 Press Law provide for the freedom of free speech and of the press; however, the Government used legal and other mechanisms to restrict these rights in practice. The Government continued to prosecute journalists and editors for publishing articles that violated the Press Law, and some journalists practiced self-censorship. Nonetheless, the private press was very active and often published articles extremely critical of the Government.

The Government uses provisions of the Press Law concerning publishing false information, inciting ethnic hatred, and libel to justify the arrest of journalists. The number of journalists in prison dropped from 15 at the beginning of the year to 8 at year's end: a total of 9 journalists were detained during the year, including 2 who remained in detention at year's end. Most of the journalists detained were accused of violating the Press Law.

Five journalists of the Oromo-oriented private weekly "Urjii", arrested in October and December 1997, are among the group of 65 Oromos indicted for involvement in OLF terrorist activities (see Section 1.d.). Three of these journalists remain in prison and also are on trial for press law violations. In March the acting editor in chief of Urjii, Alemu Tolossa, was released after paying bail of approximately \$125 (1,000 birr). Former Urjii publisher and secretary general of the Human Rights League, Garoma Bekele, was convicted on one count of violating the press law and, in May, was sentenced to 1-year's imprisonment. Five other Press Law charges are pending against him.

Two journalists detained for violating the Press Law remain in jail because they cannot meet bail (see Section 1.e.). Approximately 45 journalists who obtained bail still are subject to trial for violations of the Press Law.

In April Samson Seyoum, former editor in chief of Agere and Tequami, now defunct weekly independent newspapers, was sentenced to 4 1/2 years' imprisonment on charges of incitement to war and attempting to spread Islamic fundamentalism. This is the longest sentence handed down to any journalist in the country. Seyoum had been detained since December 1995. In August the court released Samson Seyoum pending appeal of his conviction. In May Fisseha Alemu, editor in chief of the newspaper Tarik, was sentenced to 1 year and 1 month in prison for libel. In July he was released for time served.

In December the editor in chief of the Amharic-language newspaper Tobia was given a 6-month suspended sentence for publishing an article allegedly inciting ethnic animosities against Tigrayans.

In May and June, three newspaper editors, Abonesh Abera and Sisay Agena of Ethop, and Dawit Taye, former editor in chief of Aemero, both independent weekly newspapers, were found not guilty and acquitted of Press Law violations. The charges related to news reports and editorials on the assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1996 that were critical of Ethiopian security.

However, despite the overhanging threat of legal action, the private press is still very active. Many private newspapers continue to publish false information, unsubstantiated stories, and harsh antigovernment articles without any official sanction. The Government has not banned any newspaper or publication. The office of the government spokesperson was created in 1998 as a temporary entity responsible for distributing press releases on the border conflict with Eritrea to the Ethiopian news agency, foreign news agencies, foreign embassies, and international organizations. The Government continued to bar some private newspapers and news organizations from attending government briefings and press conferences, and most government officials still refuse to meet with private journalists.

The Ethiopian Free Press Journalist's Association (EFPJA), which consists of 80 members from the private press, has been trying for 5 years to gain Ministry of Justice approval for its registration as a professional association, without success (see Section 2.b.).

Although most independent newspapers have supported the Government's position on the conflict with Eritrea, the private press remained confrontational and continued to publish articles extremely critical of the Government and continued to report on human rights abuses.

According to the Constitution, citizens generally are free to discuss publicly any topic they choose; however, on occasion the Government restricted this right in practice. The Government opposed the activities and operations of groups critical of the Government such as the ETA and the HRL (see Sections 2.b. and 4), and arrested two teachers who criticized a new government education policy (see Sections 1.d. and Section 5). Nevertheless, several groups critical of the Government held press conferences and public meetings without retribution. For example, in June EHRCO held a news conference that was covered by both government and private news media, and in November Parliament invited opposition political parties to appear on a political panel with EPRDF leadership, during which opposition criticism of government policy was reported on national radio and television.

Because of a high illiteracy rate and extreme poverty, only about 1 percent of citizens regularly read any newspaper or magazine. While the literacy rate for persons over 10 years of age in Addis Ababa is 82.5 percent, the overall literacy rate is only 23.4 percent. Furthermore, private newspapers are not circulated widely outside the capital and, as a result, citizens outside of Addis Ababa have extremely limited access to the print media.

There are 27 independent Amharic language weekly newspapers and 6 independent English language weekly newspapers with an estimated total circulation of 144,000. There are 5 EPRDF coalition party newspapers, published in Amharic, Tigrigna, and Oromiffa languages, with a total circulation of 120,000.

Nearly all private newspapers as well as state newspapers are printed at one of the state-owned printing presses, but there were no reports of problems printing any newspapers or magazines. The Ministry of Information and Culture requires that newspapers show a bank balance of approximately \$1,250 (10,000 birr) at the time of their annual registration for a license. In December the Ministry reportedly ordered 12 newspapers, including 4 weekly independent political newspaper, to close when they were unable to show sufficient bank assets.

While much of the private press continues to lack professionalism in its reporting, some print media are developing into more responsible publications. Others actually are opposition newsletters that often purvey unsubstantiated criticism of the Government. Several are tied to distinct ethnic groups, especially the Amharas and Oromos, but severely criticize the Government for being ethnocentric. Newspapers critical of government leaders and their policies are available widely in the capital but scarce elsewhere.

Foreign journalists continued to operate freely and often wrote articles critical of government policies. They or their local affiliates were granted greater access to government officials than were local independent journalists. A number of foreign journalists were allowed to go to the war front under restricted circumstances. About 10 Ethiopian affiliates of foreign news agencies also were permitted to go to the war front in February and August to visit liberated areas and Eritrean prisoners of war. Local journalists representing privately owned newspapers were denied access to the war front.

Radio remains the most influential medium for reaching citizens, especially those who live in rural areas. The Press Law allows for private radio stations, but there only are two nongovernmental radio stations in operation: Radio Fana, a station controlled by the ruling EPRDF coalition, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) radio, which broadcasts in the Tigrigna language from Mekele. The Government operates the sole television station, and news is controlled tightly. However, there are no restrictions on access to international news broadcasts. Ownership of private satellite receiving dishes and the importation of facsimile machines and modems are permitted. Internet access is unrestricted. During the year, the Government issued regulations providing for the licensing of private Internet service providers; however, no private Internet service providers were operating at year's end. Private satellite transmission uplinks are not allowed, even for international organizations.

In June the Government issued a broadcast proclamation creating a broadcasting authority to review applications for private radio and television licenses; however, there were delays in promulgating the proclamation and establishing the authority. The broadcast proclamation prohibits political parties and religious organizations from owning stations; foreign ownership also is prohibited.

The official media, including broadcast, wire service, and print media, legally are autonomous and responsible for their own management and partial revenue generation, although they continue to receive government subsidies. Government reporters practice self-censorship, but at times questioned official policies. The Government's press and information department acts as an official spokesperson and implemented the 1996 Information Policy, which guides contacts among the Government, the press, and the public.

Academic freedom is respected; however, in general, political activity is not encouraged on university campuses. The Ministry of Education has approved the charter for the country's first private university, Unity College. This 4-year college is to offer a complete bachelor's degree program, including a major in journalism. Despite government assurances that Addis Ababa University would not be affected by the conflict with Eritrea, in 1998 the institution dismissed nine Ethiopian academics of Eritrean origin. In addition, in 1998 the authorities detained approximately 82 Eritrean exchange students early in the hostilities. Most of the students were released in 1998, and in February the last 39 students were released and returned to Eritrea (see Section 1.d.).

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly; however, on occasion the Government restricted this right in practice. Organizers of large public meetings or demonstrations must notify the Government in advance and obtain a permit. While there were no reports that any permits were denied, there were long unexplained delays in issuing permits, which hindered the ability of groups to organize events. EHRCO and some opposition political parties reported that they had difficulties renting halls from local government officials. The ETA was not permitted to organize seminars in the regions, despite Ministry of Education assurances in 1998 that it would be allowed to do so.

In January the Coalition of Ethiopian Opposition Political Organizations held a rally in Addis Ababa to announce its political agenda. The rally was attended by fewer than 3,000

persons. The organizers stated that they were unable to organize properly for the event because local authorities did not approve their permit for the rally until the day before the event was to occur. Both the government and private press covered the rally.

In November student demonstrations against the arrest of two teachers who criticized new textbooks in the Welayita speaking sections of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region State (SNNPRS) led to widespread demonstrations and riots during which police killed up to 10 persons, injured hundreds, and arrested and detained as many as 1,000 others (see Sections 1.a., 1.c. 1.d. and 5).

In November Nuer students in the Gambella region demonstrated for the use of the Nuer language in schools (see Section 5). In December the Government arrested up to 26 Nuer tribal political activists and leaders associated with the GPDC on charges of inciting the Nuer students to demonstrate (see Sections 1.d. and 5.).

The Constitution provides for freedom of association and the right to engage in unrestricted peaceful political activity; however, the Government limits this right in practice. The Government changed its procedures for registration of NGO's in 1996, and the NGO registration process has improved significantly over previous years; however, a number of policy issues regarding NGO's remain unresolved, and the NGO registration process still is extremely slow. Primary registration rests with the Ministry of Justice. EHRCO was granted registration as an NGO in June, after a 7-year effort. However, the Ethiopian Free Press Journalist's Association (EFPJA), which consists of 80 members from the private press, has been trying for 5 years to gain Ministry of Justice approval for its registration as a professional association, without success. The Ministry of Justice recognizes the Ethiopia Journalists' Association (EJA), which represents journalists working for government-owned media.

Authorities closed the offices of the HRL in April 1998, on the grounds that some HRL board members wished to use the organization as a front for the OLF. Board members denied any connection to the OLF. The HRL had been operating without a license, but it had fulfilled the prerequisites for licensing and had been waiting for over a year to get a license (see Section 4). The government investigation of the HRL was ongoing at year's end, and the contents of its office, confiscated by the Government in 1998, have not been returned.

The Government requires political parties to register with the NEB. Parties that do not participate in two consecutive national elections are subject to deregistration. Registered political parties also must receive permission from regional governments to open local offices. The opposition AAPO complained that the Oromiya regional government has refused its application to open branch offices in the region. There are 58 organized political parties. Of these, eight are national parties, and the remainder operate only in limited areas. In June a European diplomat received an official reprimand from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for inviting a registered political party to meet with the international donor working group to discuss preparations for elections in 2000 (see Section 3).

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, while the Government generally respects freedom of religion in practice, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right.

The Government requires that religious groups be registered. Religious institutions, like NGO's, are registered with the Ministry of Justice and must renew their registration every year. Unlike NGO's, religious groups are not subject to a rigorous registration process. Two religious organizations reportedly have refused to comply with the government requirement that they register, without consequence. Under current law, a religious organization that undertakes development activities must register its development wing

separately as an NGO. The Government does not issue work visas to foreign religious workers unless they are attached to the development wing of a religious organizations. Religious groups are not accorded duty-free status, but they are given free government land for churches, schools, hospitals, and cemeteries. Religious groups, like private individuals or businesses, must apply to regional and local governments for land allocation. An interfaith effort is underway to promote revision of the law, since it affects the duty-free status of religious groups.

In March Jehovah's Witnesses received a letter of apology from a court in Tigray for actions taken in 1998 by local officials to disrupt a religious service and the temporary detention of some 50 believers. There are more than 3,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. When the Government began deporting Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin in 1998, it decided that members of Jehovah's Witnesses of Eritrean origin, who might face religious persecution in Eritrea, were not to be subject to deportation. Approximately 100 members of Jehovah's Witnesses from Eritrea were permitted to remain in the county despite their Eritrean nationality.

There was a credible report that local officials extorted medical supplies from a clinic operated by a religious organization for sale on the black market. The officials threatened to cancel the NGO registration of the clinic if they did not cooperate.

Evangelical leaders have complained of strict regulations on the importation of bibles, as well as heavy customs duty on bibles and other religious articles; however, bibles and religious articles are subject to the same customs duty as are all imported books and most imported items.

There were some instances of conflict among religious groups, most noticeably between Orthodox Christians on the one hand, and evangelicals and Pentecostals on the other. While some Pentecostals and evangelicals complained in past years that the police failed to protect them adequately during instances of interreligious conflict, there were no complaints of inadequate police protection during the year. In most interreligious disputes, the Government maintains neutrality and tries to be an impartial arbitrator. Some religious leaders have requested the establishment of a federal institution to deal with religious groups. The Government considered the request, but had taken no action to establish such a federal institution by year's end.

The Constitution requires the separation of church and state. The Government has interpreted this constitutional provision to mean that religious instruction is not permitted in schools, whether they are public or private schools. Catholic, Orthodox, evangelical and Muslim-owned and operated schools are not permitted to teach religion as a course of study. Most private schools teach a morals course as part of the school's curriculum, and the Government Education Bureau in Addis Ababa has complained that such courses are not free of religious influence. Churches are permitted to have Sunday schools, the Koran is taught at mosques, and public schools permit the formation of clubs, including those of a religious nature.

Muslim leaders complained that public school authorities sometimes interfered with their free practice of Islam. Certain public school teachers in the SNNPRS, Addis Ababa, and in the Amhara region objected to Muslim schoolgirls covering their heads with scarves while at school. In February a school in Wolde in the Amhara region closed for 3 weeks when Muslim girls insisted on wearing their headscarves to class. In April Muslim leaders complained that Addis Ababa University refused to serve food appropriate for the Muslim Eid feast to Muslim students. When three Muslim students complained, the university expelled them.

Protestant groups occasionally complained that local officials discriminate against them when seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders complain that because they are perceived as "newcomers" they remain at a disadvantage compared with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Supreme Islamic Council when it comes to the

allocation of land.

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of movement, including the right of domestic and foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation; however, the Government restricted these rights in practice. In principle, citizens can freely change their residence or workplace; however, since the outbreak of the border conflict with Eritrea in May 1998, Eritreans and Ethiopian citizens of Eritrean origin were subjected to detention and deportation to Eritrea. By year's end, more than 67,000 such persons had been compelled to leave or had left Ethiopia for Eritrea; the vast majority were deported, although a small number left the country voluntarily to join family members who were deported (see Section 1.d.). It is estimated that more than 200,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin remain in Ethiopia. In August the Government decreed that all Eritreans, 18 years of age and above residing in Ethiopia who either had taken part in the 1993 referendum on the independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia or who had been granted Eritrean citizenship, had to register as aliens with the SIRAA immediately. Those registering would be issued an identity card and given a 6-month residence permit; however, this permit does not permit individuals access to hospitals or other public services. The Ethiopian passports of residents of Eritrean origin routinely were confiscated or restricted in use for a single exit and no reentry.

Beginning in April, the Government adopted a policy of releasing those Eritrean detainees from the Bilate and Dedesa internment camps who could obtain visas to a country other than Eritrea. Approximately 90 detainees took advantage of this opportunity, with most going to African countries, particularly Uganda and Malawi. In August 25 detainees obtained fraudulent Malawian visas and traveled to Malawi with government-issued laissez-passers. They were returned forcibly to Ethiopia after refusing an offer to travel to Eritrea. One former detainee died and at least six others were wounded in a confrontation with Malawi police. The Government reportedly reacted to this incident by deciding not to permit detainees to depart for countries in Africa.

The law requires citizens and residents to obtain an exit visa before departing the country. Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin have been able to obtain exit visas but often are not permitted to return to the country.

In Addis Ababa and western Gondar in the Amhara region there are very small concentrations of Ethiopian Jews (Falashas) and those who claim that their ancestors were forced to convert from Judaism to Ethiopian Orthodoxy (Feles Mora). Approximately 3,000 Feles Mora migrated voluntarily from the western Amhara region to Addis Ababa in 1991 at the time of "Operation Solomon," when a large number of Falashas were airlifted to Israel. The Feles Mora also seek to immigrate to Israel. The number of Feles Mora in the country is approximately 9,000. Israeli officials evaluate the Feles Mora immigration claims on a case-by-case basis and estimate that approximately 20 percent of the Feles Mora eventually may be eligible to immigrate under Israel's law of return. In June the Israeli Government announced that 3,500 Falashas requesting citizenship would be airlifted from Quara, Ethiopia to Israel, and in July 6 Israeli officials went to Gondar to process applications. All the eligible Falashas in Quara left for Israel by year's end.

As a result of the border dispute with Eritrea, approximately 343,000 persons have been displaced internally. The Government has presented relief and rehabilitation proposals for these internally displaced persons to bilateral donors and NGO's.

The law includes provisions for the granting of refugee and asylee status in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government generally treats asylum seekers fairly and cooperates with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and returning citizens. However, there were reports of the forced return of Djiboutian Afars who were

not permitted to register as refugees.

Ethiopia hosts 261,661 refugees; most are from Somalia and Sudan. The Government, in cooperation with UNHCR, continues to provide first asylum to refugees from Sudan and Somalia. Along the border of northwest Somalia 195,345 Somali refugees were settled in eight camps, down from 600,000 in 1996. Along the Sudanese border 58,600 Sudanese refugees were settled in four refugee camps around Gambella and Asossa at year's end. Approximately 80 percent of the Sudanese refugees are women and children. There are approximately 1,500 Djiboutian Afar asylum-seekers remaining in the country, down from a high of 18,000 when Djiboutian Afars first entered the country in 1993. These asylum seekers have requested but never were granted formal registration by the Ethiopian Agency for Refugee and Resettlement Affairs (ARRA). Negotiations began in 1997 between the Government and the UNHCR concerning their status and were ongoing at year's end. ARRA conducted an informal registration of Djiboutian Afars in May without UNHCR involvement.

In June Kenya repatriated 1,388 Ethiopians from refugee camps. In October the Government began repatriating 4,700 Kenyans from the Moyale refugee camp; however, approximately 550 Kenyan refugees were turned away at the Kenyan border due to a lack of proper identification and were returned to the camp. They had not been repatriated by year's end. During the year the UNHCR repatriated approximately 15,000 Somali refugees to northwest Somalia.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change their Government

Citizens exercised the right to vote for a national government for the first time in 1995; however, most opposition groups boycotted the election, claiming that the Government impeded their ability to participate in the political process, and those who participated complained of harassment. The boycott was one of the factors that led to an overwhelming victory by the better-funded and better-organized EPRDF over candidates of the relatively weak and poorly organized opposition parties and independent candidates. Nevertheless, observers organized by foreign donor governments, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and a coalition of domestic NGO's judged the elections to be generally free and fair, although they cited numerous irregularities.

The Constitution requires that elections to the national legislative body, the HPR, be held every 5 years; the next elections are scheduled for May 2000. Seventeen opposition political parties are expected to contest the election, including the AAPPO, the Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Coalition, and the Oromo National Congress. In August all registered political parties were invited to a meeting sponsored by Africa Initiative for a Democratic World Order and the Addis Ababa University student association to discuss the ground rules for the elections. In November the Government initiated a dialog with opposition parties to discuss preparations for the election. Government officials stated that they would accept election monitoring by the OAU, local U.N. staff, and domestic NGO's, but that they would not invite international observers. In June a European diplomat received an official reprimand from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for inviting a registered political party to meet with the international donor working group to discuss preparations for the year 2000 elections. The Government stated that it would make efforts to level the playing field for non-EPRDF political parties, particularly in regard to access to mass media and the ability to open offices. The Government addressed one primary complaint of opposition parties by establishing an election time-table for nominating party candidates and for campaign activities that is much longer than the time-table used in the 1995 elections. In December the HPR struck down the election law that required civil servants to resign from their posts if they wished to run for elections.

The NEB is investigating abuses of election laws related to candidate registration for the 2000 election in the SNNPRS and in the Gambella region. There were credible reports the local officials throughout the country ignored NEB instructions on the acceptance of candidate endorsement signatures from opposition party candidates. In December the Government arrested up to 26 Nuer tribal political activists associated with the GPDC on

charges of inciting Nuer students in November to demonstrate for the use of the Nuer language in schools (see Sections 1.d. and 5.). The GPDC claimed that charges were without merit and that the Government was attempting to interfere with the political process for the 2000 elections. The NEB sent investigators to the region, but had not issued a report by year's end. Political participation remains closed to a number of organizations that have not renounced violence and do not accept the Government as a legitimate authority. These groups include Medhin, the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, the Oromo Liberation Front, some elements of the Ogaden National Liberation Front, and several smaller Somali groups. The AAPO complained that the Oromiya regional government refused its application to open branch offices in the region (see Section 2.b.).

Neither law nor practice restricts the participation of women in politics; however, while women's status and political participation are greater than ever, women are underrepresented in national politics, the Council of Ministers, and among the leadership of all political organizations. Only 1 of the 15 members of the Council of Ministers is a woman; 2 other women hold ministerial rank; and a number of others hold senior positions. There only are 15 women among the 545 members of the HPR, and only 8 of 115 members in the upper house, the House of Federation, are women, including the speaker. Among the 23 judges on the federal High Court, 6 are women, and there are 2 women on the Supreme Court.

The government policy of ethnic federalism led to the creation of individual constituencies to help ensure representation in the HPR of all major ethnic groups; however, small ethnic groups were not represented in the legislature. There are 23 nationality groups in 6 of the region states that do not have a sufficient population to qualify for constituency seats, and as a result, the Government determined that individuals from these nationality groups would compete in 2000 for 23 special seats in addition to the 545-seat HPR.

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

Human rights organizations include EHRCO, the HRL, the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association, the Inter-Africa Group, the National Committee on Traditional Practices, the Peace and Development Committee, the Society for the Advancement of Human Rights Education, Enwayay, the Center for Local Capacity Building and Studies, African Initiatives for a Democratic World Order, and Hundee. These and numerous other groups primarily are engaged in civic and human rights education, legal assistance, and trial monitoring. The Research Center for Civil and Human Rights was registered in January, having applied in 1997. In June EHRCO, which monitors human rights, received legal status as an NGO after a 7-year effort, after winning a suit in January against the Government for blocking its bank accounts. The HRL, founded by prominent Oromo civic leaders in 1997, still is being investigated by the Government for its alleged ties to the OLF. Authorities closed the offices of the HRL in April 1998 and confiscated the contents of its offices, which have not been returned (see Section 2.b.). In October the Ministry of Justice decertified the Ethiopian Congress for Democracy, reportedly for financial irregularities.

In March 160 domestic and international NGO's signed a code of conduct and formed a code observance committee. The code details standards of conduct for numerous areas including moral and ethical integrity, transparency and accountability, good governance, gender equity, and environmental consciousness. The code observance committee, composed of five members elected by the NGO general assembly and two representatives from civil society at large, hears and decides matters in all instances involving a violation or breach of the code.

The ICRC conducts regular visits to detention centers and prisons throughout the country; however, since July the Government has denied it access to the Central Investigation Department of the Addis Ababa police. In addition, the ICRC was unable to gain access to

police stations in Addis Ababa where ethnic Eritreans are believed to be detained (see Section 1.c.). Until September the ICRC escorted ethnic Eritrean deportees during their several mile walk across "no man's land" --the distance from the deportation bus stops at the Ethiopian border into Eritrea. However, in September the Government ceased to inform the ICRC of deportations (see Section 2.d.) The ICRC was given access to Eritrean POW's in camps along the border with Eritrea and in other regions; however, in February the Government asked the ICRC to leave the Tigray region for several months (see Section 2.d.). In 1998 the Government invited the ICRC, international NGO's, and foreign diplomats to visit centers where detained Eritreans were gathered prior to deportation, and permitted diplomats to visit ethnic Eritrean detainees in Bilate prison camp. In April diplomats visited Bilate prison camp.

The Government is required under the Constitution to establish a human rights commission and office of the ombudsman. An international conference on the subject was held in 1998, followed by extensive public hearings during the year attended by NGO's, opposition groups, and a wide variety of members of civic society. The HPR passed enabling legislation in October. The office of the ombudsman is expected to have the authority to receive and investigate complaints with respect to misadministration by executive branch offices. Neither entity was operational by year's end.

The Government continues to encourage international human rights groups and foreign diplomats to observe the war crimes trials that began in 1994. Officials of the Federal Security Authority generally have been responsive to requests for information from the diplomatic community. Several international human rights groups visited the country during the year.

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

The Constitution states that all persons are equal before the law. The law provides that all persons should have equal and effective protection without discrimination on grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth, or other status. However, the Government has not yet fully put into place mechanisms for the effective enforcement of these protections.

Women

Culturally-based abuses including wife beating and marital rape are pervasive social problems. While women have recourse to the police and the courts, societal norms and limited infrastructure inhibit many women from seeking legal redress, especially in remote areas. Social practices obstruct investigations into rape and the prosecution of the rapist, and many women are not aware of their rights under the law. There are only an estimated 20 rape convictions a year and rape sentences typically are much lighter than the 10 to 15 years prescribed by law.

The Constitution provides for the equality of women; however, these provisions often are not applied in practice. Furthermore, these provisions often are in conflict with the 1960 Civil Code and the 1957 Penal Code, both of which still are in force. The 1960 Civil Code is based on a monarchical constitution that treated women as if they were children or disabled. Discriminatory regulations in the civil code include recognizing the husband as the legal head of the family and designating him as the sole guardian of children over 5 years old. Family Arbitration Councils, and not the courts, have the legal power to dissolve marriages. Domestic violence is not considered a serious justification under the law to obtain a divorce. There is only limited juridical recognition of common-law marriage. Irrespective of the number of years the marriage has existed, the number of children raised and the joint property, the woman is entitled to only 3 months' financial support should the relationship end. However, a husband has no obligation to provide financial assistance to his family and, as a result, women and children sometimes are abandoned when there is a problem in the marriage. All land belongs to the State;

however, land reforms enacted in March 1997 stipulate that women may obtain government leases to land. Discrimination is most acute in rural areas, where 85 percent of the population lives. In urban areas, women have fewer employment opportunities than men do, and the jobs available do not provide equal pay for equal work. As a result of changes in the Labor Law in 1998, thousands of women traveled to the Middle East as industrial and domestic workers. There were credible reports that female workers were abused, and even killed, in these positions (see Section 6.f).

Although illegal, the abduction of women and girls as a form of marriage still is widely practiced in Oromiya regions and the SNNPRS. Forced sexual relationships often accompany most marriages by abduction, and women often are abused physically during the abduction. Abductions have led to conflicts between families, communities, and ethnic groups.

To enhance the status of women, the Government formally adopted a National Program of Action in 1997. The program seeks to expand educational and work opportunities for women, improve women's access to health care, and educate women about certain unhealthy traditional practices such as early marriage. There have been few improvements in the status of women since the inception of this program; however, girls reportedly attended school in greater numbers in some regions, and according to a study done by the National Committee on Harmful Traditional Practices (NCTPE), certain harmful traditional practices such as early marriage and marriage by abduction appeared to be on the decline.

In December 1998, the Ministry of Justice completed a draft Family Law with the purpose of bringing discriminatory elements of the 1960 Civil Code into accord with the Constitution. The draft was sent to the Council of Ministers and the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives organized six forums during the year with participants from all sectors and regions of the country to discuss the law and the various issues still in need of reform. The draft bill still was under discussion at year's end.

The Ministry of Justice also completed a revision of the 1957 Penal Code and a national debate on the revisions began. Critical issues affecting women and children include the penalties for rape, domestic violence, and child molestation. However, regardless of changes to the Penal Code, tradition and culture often prevail over civil and criminal law, and in practice women do not enjoy equal status with men. For example, the harmful traditional practice of abduction as a form of marriage already is illegal under the penal code but still is widely practiced in many rural areas.

Children

The Government has encouraged efforts by domestic and international NGO's that focus on children's social, health, and legal issues. For example, local officials provided transportation and free facilities to NGO outreach activities. However, the Government has limited ability to provide improved health care and basic education. Despite efforts by the Government to increase the number of schools, including the construction of 303 new schools during the year, there are not enough schools to accommodate the country's youth. Nationwide, only 52 percent of male primary age children and 31 percent of female primary age children attend school, and many do so in shifts. However, government reports show that over 40 percent of the children who attend school leave the system before they reach grade two of primary school. The chance of their relapsing to illiteracy is high. The overall literacy rate is approximately 23 percent; however, only 17 percent of women are literate compared with 26 percent of men. Only 10 percent of males and 7 percent of females attend secondary school. In 1998 only 23,712 males and 8,484 females earned a school-leaving certificate, a prerequisite to attend college. There is space in institutions of higher education for only a small percentage of these graduates.

Five additional Child Protection Units (CPU's) were created in Addis Ababa's police stations to protect the rights of children by assisting them when they become victims of

crime. There are a total of 10 CPU's, which are staffed by members of an NGO. Some police officers underwent training on procedures for handling cases of child abuse and juvenile delinquency. Nevertheless, there is a clear need for reform of the juvenile justice system. The Federal Supreme Court has assigned only three judges to sit on one bench to hear all cases of juvenile offenses. There is a large backlog of juvenile cases and accused children often remain in detention with adults until their cases are heard. There is only one juvenile remand home with a capacity of 150 for children under age 15, and the juveniles who cannot be accommodated at the juvenile remand home are incarcerated with adults.

Societal abuse of young girls continues to be a problem. The majority of girls undergo some form of female genital mutilation (FGM), which is widely condemned by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health. The NCTPE conducted a survey that was published in 1998, which indicated that 72.7 percent of the female population had undergone FGM, down from an estimated 90 percent of the female population in 1990. Clitoridectomies typically are performed 7 days after birth and consist of an excision of the labia. Infibulation, the most extreme and dangerous form of FGM, is performed at any time between the age of 8 and the onset of puberty. The law does not specifically prohibit FGM, although it is discouraged officially, and the Government has been very supportive of the NCTPE. The Government also is working to discourage the practice of FGM through education in public schools.

Other harmful traditional practices surveyed by the NCTPE included uvulectomy, milk-teeth extraction, early marriage, marriage by abduction, and food and work prohibitions. The Constitution defines the age of consent as 15 for females and 18 for males. Nevertheless, early childhood marriage is common in rural areas, with girls as young as age 9 subjected to arranged marriages. In the Afar region of the east, young girls continue to be married to much older men, but this traditional practice is coming under greater scrutiny and criticism. The Tigray Women's Association also has had an impact in changing societal attitudes toward early marriage. Pregnancy at an early age often leads to obstetric fistulae resulting in lifelong misery due to total and permanent incontinence. Treatment is available at only one hospital in Addis Ababa that performs over 1,000 fistula operations a year. It estimates that for every successful operation performed, 10 other young women need the treatment. The maternal mortality rate is extremely high due, in part, to food taboos for pregnant women, poverty, early marriage, and birth complications related to FGM, especially infibulation.

UNICEF estimates that there are approximately 150,000 street children in the urban areas, of which 100,000 reside in Addis Ababa. These children beg, sometimes as part of a gang, or work in the informal sector in order to survive (see Section 6.d.). Government and privately run orphanages are unable to handle the number of street children, and older children often abuse younger children. Due to severe resource constraints, abandoned infants often are overlooked or neglected at hospitals and orphanages. There are a few credible reports that children are maimed or blinded by their "handlers" in order to raise their earnings from begging.

Child prostitution continues to be a problem. In 1996, a National Steering Committee Against Sexual Exploitation of Children was formed and is chaired by the Children, Youth, and Family Affairs Department of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. In October the committee reported that child prostitution is on the increase especially in major urban centers of the country. NGO's report that girls as young as age 11 are recruited to work in houses of prostitution where they are kept ignorant of the risks of HIV infection. There have been many press reports of the large-scale employment of children, especially underage girls, as hotel workers, barmaids, and prostitutes in resort towns and truckstops south of Addis Ababa. In past years, there were reports that poor rural families sold their young teenage daughters to hotel and bar owners on the main truck routes; however, there were no reports of such activity during the year. Social workers note that young girls are prized because their clients believe that they are free of sexually transmitted diseases. The unwanted babies of these young girls usually are abandoned at hospitals, police stations, welfare clinics, and adoption agencies. There were numerous anecdotal accounts of young girls going to the Middle East to work as house

servants and nannies, some of whom were abused, including sexually. (see also Section 6.c., 6.d., and 6.f.). Factors aggravating the problem of child prostitution are pervasive poverty, migration to urban centers, and limited educational and job opportunities.

Child labor is pervasive, and child laborers sometimes are subjected to abuse, including neglect, and among children working as domestic servants, sexual abuse and rape (see Section 6.d.).

It is the policy of the Ministry of Defense not to permit persons under the age of 18 to join the armed forces, and the Government made efforts to enforce this policy; however, there were reports that some children under the age of 18 were recruited into the military. There were reports that local officials have been given military "recruitment quotas" to fill and that, as a result, they are recruiting students who are 18 years of age or older. If young boys demonstrated that they are under 18, they are exempted; however, in rural areas children often do not have birth certificates. There is also evidence that persons under the age of 18 were able to obtain documentation to overstate their age and join the armed forces. There is evidence that children as young as age 14 are permitted to join local militias with the consent of village leaders. This reportedly is part of an effort to keep children in local areas despite limited educational or employment opportunities.

People with Disabilities

The Constitution stipulates that the State shall allocate resources to provide rehabilitation and assistance to the physically and mentally disabled; however, limited government resources restrict action in these areas. The Government has not yet put into place mechanisms to enforce a 1994 law mandating equal rights for the disabled. The Government does not mandate access to buildings or government services for the disabled, and persons with minor disabilities sometimes complain of job discrimination. According to one NGO report, only 500 of the approximately 700,000 visually impaired persons in the country have access to employment opportunities. There are numerous domestic NGO's that work with the disabled. For example, the Amhara Development Association operates a project to provide vocational training to disabled war veterans in Bahir Dar. The Tigray Development Association has established a similar center in Mekele. A 1994 census determined that there were 989,000 disabled persons in the country; however, observers believe that number has grown and is significantly higher.

Religious Minorities

Despite the generally broad level of societal tolerance for established faiths, there were instances of open conflict among religious groups in past years, most noticeably between Ethiopian Orthodox Christians on the one hand, and Pentecostals and evangelicals on the other, and there continued to be pockets of interreligious tension and criticism during the year. Newer faiths such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals have encountered overt opposition from the public. Muslims and Orthodox Christians complain about proselytization by Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses. Ethiopian Orthodox leaders complain that sometimes Protestants fail to respect Orthodox holy days and Orthodox customs. Muslims complain that some Pentecostal preachers disparage Islam in their services. There were complaints by Muslim leaders that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's desire to "show supremacy" sometimes caused irritation in the country's various regions.

Protestant and Pentecostal leaders complained that, on occasion, Orthodox or evangelical adherents interrupted Protestant and Pentecostal religious meetings and attempted to prevent the construction of Protestant churches in predominately Orthodox or evangelical areas.

In February a Seventh-Day Adventist minister rented a room in a building in Bahir Dir and conducted a religious service. Local Ethiopian Orthodox Church members gathered outside the building and threw stones. There were no reported injuries.

In April two Muslim communities attempted to construct new mosques but abandoned the construction when local Orthodox Church members caused damage to the construction sites and beat one Muslim who tried to prevent their actions.

Nevertheless, in most sections of the country Orthodox Christians and Muslims participate in each other's religious observances, and there is tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas, most notably in Welo, as well as in urban areas throughout the country. In the capital, Addis Ababa, persons of different faiths often live side-by-side. Most urban areas reflect a mixture of all religious denominations. Longstanding evangelical Protestant denominations, particularly the Mekane Yesus Church and Kale Hiwot Churches, provide social services such as health care and education to nonmembers as well as to members. Mekane Yesus and Kale Hiwot leaders reported improved relations with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church during the year.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There are more than 80 ethnic groups. Although many of these groups have influenced the political and cultural life of the country, Amharas and Tigrayans from the northern highlands have played a dominant role. Some ethnic groups such as the Oromos, the largest single group, were subjugated during the 19th century. In an attempt to address ethnic concerns, the Government has established a federal system with political boundaries drawn roughly along major ethnic lines. With federalism regional states have much greater control over their affairs. In Oromiya, for example, the regional government required that all primary schools adopt Oromiffa as the language of instruction. This has drawn protests from groups that reside in Oromiya whose mother tongue is not Oromiffa and who believe that their children are now at a disadvantage. There are credible reports that teachers and other government workers have had their employment terminated if they are not of the dominant ethnic group in the region.

In May local administrators in the SNNPRS informed elementary and high school teachers that new textbooks would be used in the North Omo Zone, which merged four closely related languages spoken in the zone: Welayita, Gamo, Goffa, and Dawro. Neither local communities nor teachers had been consulted before the decision was made to introduce the new textbooks. Representatives of the elders committee of the Welayita ethnic group complained to local and federal officials about the loss of the Welayita language as a means of instruction and requested that the Welayita be granted zonal status within the SNNPRS, but the officials denied their request. The Welayita ethnic group has a larger population than four federal region states, but only controls 7 of the 22 districts in the North Omo zone. When the school year began, students boycotted classes in protest of the new textbooks, and in November police arrested two teachers for objecting to the new language (see Section 1.d.). The arrests led to widespread demonstrations and rioting in the city of Sodo during which police killed up to 10 persons, injured hundreds, and arrested and detained as many as 1,000 others (see Sections 1.a., 1.c. and 1.d.). Schools remained closed until December, approximately 100 special police remained in Sodo at year's end, and approximately 100 teachers were transferred from the area because of their opposition to the new language.

There has been a long history of tension between the Nuer and Anuak tribal groups. In November Nuer students in the Gambella region demonstrated for the use of the Nuer language in schools: the Amharic language is the medium of instruction in schools in the Gambella region. In December the Government arrested up to 26 Nuer tribal political activists associated with the GPDC on charges of inciting the Nuer students to demonstrate (see Section 1.d.). The GPDC accused the Anuak tribe, whose political organization, the Gambella People's Democratic Party, is an EPRDF affiliate, of interfering with their political activities prior to the May 2000 elections (see Section 5).

The expansion of the military from a low of 60,000 personnel in April 1998 to approximately 325,000 to 350,000 personnel at year's end has aided greatly in the goal of

bringing other ethnic groups into the military. By most accounts, the military is an ethnically diverse organization with very little friction between the various groups represented, at least in the lower ranks. At the higher ranks the officer cadre is much less ethnically diverse. Promotions awarded in July to major general, brigadier general, and colonel were heavily weighted towards the Tigray ethnic group, although some Amharas and one notable Oromo were included on the promotion list. Persons from the west, south and east conspicuously were absent from the senior officer promotion lists.

Section 6 Worker rights

a. The Right of Association

Only a small percentage of the population is involved in wage labor employment, which is concentrated largely in urban areas. Approximately 85 percent of the work force live in the countryside and are engaged in subsistence farming.

The Constitution provides most workers with the right to form and join unions and engage in collective bargaining, but the 1993 Labor Proclamation specifically excluded teachers and civil servants, including judges, prosecutors, and security services, from organizing as a union. Only 300,000 workers are unionized. The 1993 Labor Proclamation also decreed that workers who provide "essential services" are not allowed to strike. Essential services are defined broadly to include air transport services, railways, bus service, postal, police and fire services, banking, telecommunications, and medical services.

The ETA formerly had a membership of 120,000; however, that number has decreased significantly due to government intimidation and restrictions on ETA activities. In 1992 Dr. Taye Woldeamayrat was elected chairman of the ETA. Soon thereafter the ETA executive committee issued demands to protect teachers' rights and improve working conditions and questioned aspects of the Government's education policies. There are credible reports that the Government began to harass the ETA leadership at all levels beginning in 1993 and that such harassment continued during the year. In March 1996, Kebede Desta, chairman of the retired teachers union, was arrested and died in jail in March. In May 1996, Dr. Taye, upon his return from Europe, was arrested and charged with being the leader of a clandestine political organization. In May 1997, Assefa Maru, an ETA executive committee member, was killed by police. In August 1998, the Government sealed the ETA executive offices, detained ETA leaders, and transferred the assets of the ETA over to an ETA faction supportive of the Government's educational policies. In June Dr. Taye was sentenced to 15 years in prison (see Section 1.d.).

There is no requirement that unions belong to the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU), which was established in 1993, decertified in December 1994 because of internal management and political disputes, and officially reestablished and recertified in April 1997. CETU includes all nine federations organized by industrial and service sectors rather than by region. In September the Banking and Insurance Workers Federation (BIWF) rejoined CETU when four of the five core unions in the BIWF voted to join CETU.

The Labor Law stipulates that a trade organization may not act in an overtly political manner. The Labor Law explicitly gives workers the right to strike to protect their interests, but it also sets forth restrictive procedures that apply before a legal strike may take place. These apply equally to an employer's right to lock out workers. Strikes must be supported by a majority of the workers affected. The Labor Law prohibits retribution against strikers but labor leaders state that most workers are not convinced that the Government would enforce this protection. Both sides must make efforts at reconciliation, provide at least 10 days' notice to the Government, include the reasons for the action, and in cases already before a court or labor board, the party must provide at least a 30-day warning. If an agreement between unions and management cannot be reached, the Minister of Labor may refer the case to arbitration by a Labor Relations Board (LRB). The Government has established LRB's at the national level and in some regions. The

Minister of Labor and Social Affairs appoints each LRB chairman, and the four board members include two each from trade unions and employer groups. Some efforts to enforce these regulations are made within the formal industrial sector. There were no strikes during the year. Labor officials have stated that in view of high unemployment and the inattention courts have given to labor cases, workers are afraid to participate in strikes or other labor actions.

Independent unions and those belonging to CETU are free to affiliate with and participate in international labor bodies.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Collective bargaining is protected under the Labor Law and under the Constitution and is practiced freely throughout the country. Collective bargaining agreements concluded between 1975 and the promulgation of the 1993 Labor Law remain in force. Labor experts estimate that more than 90 percent of unionized workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements. Wages are negotiated at the plant level. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination by employers against union members and organizers. There are grievance procedures for hearings on allegations of discrimination brought by individuals or unions. Employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination are required to reinstate workers fired for union activities. Labor leaders point to a number of court cases that are 3 or 4 years old in which workers have been terminated for union activities as examples of inattention by the courts to worker rights. Seasonal and parttime agricultural workers are not organized even on state-owned plantations. Seasonal workers' compensation, benefits, and working conditions are far below those of unionized permanent plantation employees.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Criminal Code, which applies to persons over the age of 15 specifically prohibits forced labor; however, forced labor can be used by court order as a punitive measure. Forced or compulsory labor by children is illegal; while there were reports in past years that young girls reportedly were sold or forced into prostitution, there were no such reports during the year (see Sections 5 and 6.f.). There also were numerous anecdotal accounts of young persons, especially girls, traveling to the Middle East to work as house servants and nannies, some of whom were abused, including sexually (see Section 6.f.). The Constitution proscribes slavery, which was abolished officially in 1942, and involuntary servitude. There were no reports of slavery within the country.

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

Under the Labor Law, the minimum age for wage or salary employment is 14 years; special provisions cover children between the ages of 14 and 18, including the prohibition of night work or hazardous work.

Children may not work more than 7 hours per day; work between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.; work on public holidays or rest days; or perform overtime work. While the Government has made some effort to enforce these regulations within the formal industrial sector, social welfare activists, civic organizers, government officials, and entrepreneurs agree that child labor is pervasive throughout the country, especially in the informal sector. In urban areas, children in large numbers can be seen working in a variety of jobs, including shining shoes, hustling passengers into cabs, working as porters, selling lottery tickets, and herding animals. Child domestic workers are common. Child laborers often are abused. A research study published during the year reported that the prevalence of child abuse among urban child laborers is 70 percent, compared with 24.5 percent among non-economically active children from the same urban district. The study concluded that physical and emotional abuse were twice as common among child workers compared with non-workers, sexual abuse was five times as common, and neglect was

eight times as common. Among child workers surveyed, rapes occurred exclusively among child domestics. A second research study of child labor sponsored by CETU's National Federation of Farm, Plantation, Fishery, and Agro-industry Trade Unions and published during the year focused on rural locations. The study reported that 30 percent of the workers on state farms surveyed were between the ages of 7 and 14. Child workers typically worked 6 days a week, received no benefits, and earned less than \$10 (80 birr) a month. At one plantation 75 percent of the children worked 12-hour days. There also is evidence that children as young as age 14 are permitted to join local militias with the consent of village leaders. This reportedly is part of an effort to keep children in local areas despite limited educational or employment opportunities (see Section 5). The Government maintains that most economically active children are engaged in family-based, nonexploitative child work that is part of the socialization process and maintains that there is not a child labor problem.

Forced or compulsory labor by children is illegal, and, unlike in past years, there were no reports that it happened.(see Sections 5, 6.c. and 6.f.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

In 1995 the Government established a minimum wage of approximately \$15 (120 birr) per month for all wage earners in both the private and public sectors. In addition, each industry and service sector has established its own minimum wage. For example, public sector employees, the largest group of wage earners, earn a minimum wage of approximately \$22 (175 birr) per month; employees in the banking and insurance sector have a minimum wage of \$25 (200 birr) per month. According to the statistics reported by the Office of the Study of Wages and Other Remuneration, these wages are insufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Consequently, most families must have at least two wage earners to survive, and that is one of the reasons children leave school early.

The legal workweek, as stipulated in the Labor Law, is 48 hours, consisting of 6 days of 8 hours each, with a 24-hour rest period. However, in practice, most employees work a 40-hour workweek consisting of 5 days of 8 hours each.

The Government, industry, and unions negotiate to set occupational health and safety standards. However, the Inspection Department of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs enforces these standards ineffectively, due to a lack of human and financial resources. Workers have the right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without jeopardy to continued employment; however, most workers fear losing their jobs if they were to do so.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, there were numerous anecdotal accounts of young girls traveling to the Middle East to work as house servants and nannies, some of whom are abused, including sexually. There reportedly is a network of persons based in the tourism and import-export sectors who are involved heavily in soliciting potential clients, recruiting young girls, arranging travel, and fabricating counterfeit work permits, travel documents, and birth certificates (see Sections 5 and 6.c.).

Although illegal, the abduction of women and girls as a form of marriage still is widely practiced in Oromiya regions and the SNNPRS (see Section 5).

As a result of a change in the Labor Law the Government no longer acts as an employment agency for workers going abroad. Private entities now arrange for overseas work and as a result, the number of women being sent to Middle Eastern countries as domestic or industrial workers increased significantly. Lebanon is the most popular destination. There were credible reports that hundreds of the approximately 15,000 Ethiopian domestic workers in Lebanon were subjected to abusive conditions, including

sexual exploitation. In September and October, pictures appeared in the local press of workers returning bruised and beaten. There were also reports that Ethiopian domestic workers were abused in other Middle Eastern countries.

The Government began revising the Federal Civil and Penal Codes to increase the penalties for traffickers. Training programs were implemented for police officers on the criminal aspects of trafficking.

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