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Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Ethiopia

Executive Summary

Ethiopia is a federal republic. A coalition of ethnically based parties known as the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) controlled the government until its successor, the Prosperity Party, was formed in December. In the 2015 general elections, the EPRDF and affiliated parties won all 547 seats in the House of People's Representatives (parliament) to remain in power for a fifth consecutive five-year term. In February 2018 then prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced his resignation to accelerate political reforms in response to demands from the country's increasingly restive youth. In April 2018 parliament selected Abiy Ahmed Ali as prime minister to lead broad reforms.

Under Prime Minister Abiy, there has been an increased focus on the rule of law. The Federal Police report to the newly created Ministry of Peace as of October 2018 and are subject to parliamentary oversight, but parliament's capacity to conduct this oversight is limited. Each of the nine regions has a regional, a special police force, or both that report to regional civilian authorities. Local militias operated across the country in loose and varying coordination with these regional police, the Federal Police, and the military. Selected by community leadership, local militias are empowered to handle standard security matters within their communities, primarily in rural areas. It was widely reported that civilian authorities at times did not maintain control over regional security forces. Rural local police and militias sometimes acted independently and extrajudicially. Local government authorities provided select militia members with very basic training. Militia members serve as a bridge between the community and local police by providing information and enforcing rules. When community security was insufficient to maintain law and order, the military played an expanded role with respect to internal security; in particular, setting up military command posts in parts of the country like West and South Oromia, as well as Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' (SNNP) Region.

A number of positive changes in the human rights climate followed Abiy's assumption of office. The government decriminalized political movements that past administrations had accused of treason, invited opposition leaders to return to the country and resume political activities, allowed peaceful rallies and demonstrations, enabled the formation and unfettered operation of new political parties and media outlets, continued steps to release thousands of political prisoners, and undertook revisions of repressive laws. In

recent months, however, the government used the Antiterrorism Proclamation (ATP) to buy time for investigations pertaining to the killing of government officials on June 22. Additionally, humanitarian partners cited the lack of safe, voluntary, and dignified returns of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their lack of access to those IDPs as major concerns.

Significant human rights issues included: reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings by security forces; citizens killing other citizens based on their ethnicity; unexplained disappearances; arbitrary arrest and detention by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; unlawful interference with privacy; censorship, and blocking of the internet and social media sites; criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct; and child labor, including the worst forms.

The government took steps to prosecute selected members of senior leadership for human rights abuses but decided on a policy of forgiveness for lower-level officials under its broader reconciliation efforts. The government took positive steps toward greater accountability under Abiy to change the relationship between security forces and the population. In August 2018 the federal attorney general filed criminal charges against former Somali regional president Abdi Mohammed Omar and several others relating to criminal conspiracy and armed uprising. The federal attorney general brought charges related to egregious human rights violations and corruption against Getachew Assefa, Assefa Belay, Shishay Leoul, and Atsbaha Gidey, all former officials in the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). On July 16, the Federal High Court ordered the trial to proceed in the absence of the defendants after police were unable to locate the men in the Tigray Region.

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

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were numerous reports that the government and its representatives committed arbitrary and unlawful killings. Security forces used deadly force against civilians.

On January 8, the Ethiopian National Defense Force’s (ENDF) attempt to dismantle a roadblock set up by civilians in Western Gondar in the Amhara Region resulted in a shootout in which nine individuals died. The Amhara regional president at the time of the incident, Gedu Andargachew, publicly condemned the killings and sent an investigation team to the area.

On June 22, an armed group attacked and fatally shot Amhara regional president Ambachew Mekonnen and Amhara regional government office advisor Ezez Wassie in Bahir Dar. On June 24, the Amhara Region’s attorney general, Migbaru Kebede, died from injuries sustained in the June 22 attack. Hours after the Bahir Dar killings, a bodyguard in Addis Ababa killed General Seare Mekonnen, chief of the ENDF, and retired major general Gezai Abera, former ENDF logistics chief. On June 24, during an

arrest operation near Bahir Dar, security forces killed Brigadier General Asaminew Tsige, head of the Amhara Region’s security bureau and the lead suspect in the killing of Mekonnen and other officials.

On July 18, violence that erupted in Hawassa and the broader Sidama Zone following Sidama activists’ decision unilaterally to declare statehood resulted in dozens of deaths, ethnic identity-based attacks, destruction of property, and widespread robbery. The Sidama Zone police department reported 53 individuals were killed while 54 suffered bodily injuries in the violence on and after July 18. The death figures relied on data from hospitals that excluded those killed and buried in various localities. Following this incident, regional authorities in the SNNP Region, where Sidama Zone is located, established a command post, which as of September remained active. The command post gave federal forces control over the security situation in the region.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

On January 2, fighters of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) abducted Delessa Bulcha, president of Dembi Dollo University, while he was travelling from West Wellega to Addis Ababa. The fighters released him after three days.

In May, OLA personnel in Oromia Region’s West Wellega Zone reportedly abducted and killed the ruling Oromo Democratic Party’s Seyo District head, Negesse Abu.

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

The constitution prohibits such practices, but there were reports of abuses against detainees by security officials.

In the wake of the June 22 killings in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa, police reportedly arrested more than 300 activists, politicians, and journalists. Media reported that police detained suspects in “inhuman” conditions inside the Addis Ababa Police Commission compound in Piassa, where they were kept in crowded, cold, and dark cells and only allowed to use the toilet once every 24 hours. According to media reports, police also did not allow family members and friends to visit the suspects. Police called detainees for nightly interrogations where they were forced to stand for long periods of time. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (HRCO) voiced concern over the arrests of members of NaMA, the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), the Ethiopian Citizens’ Party for Social Justice (EZEMA), journalists, and civilians.

On July 6 and 7, media reported police detained a group of suspects and kept them in cold, dark cells with very limited access to toilets. The detainees began a hunger strike, which lasted for a few days, and on July 8, police brought the suspects to court on allegations of committing terrorist crimes. The detainees reportedly continued to be held at a police station in Addis Ababa in connection with the June 22 killings.

On August 1, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated during a press briefing that his government was committed to the respect and protection of human rights and to ensuring the rule of law. He denied reports of torture as well as keeping detainees in dark cells.

In April 2018 the government announced the closure of Maekelawi, the federal crime investigation and detention center in Addis Ababa and the site of many reports of prisoner abuse in previous years. Prison officials transferred the detainees in the center to another facility. Parliament’s Legal, Justice, and Democracy Affairs Standing Committee visited the site in December 2018 and confirmed that the government had shuttered the center. In September 2018 the current administration of the Somali regional state closed Jijiga Central Prison (Jail Ogaden) known for its brutal torture of inmates. On May 26, Somali regional security officials arrested the former head of Jail Ogaden, Hassan Ismail Ibrahim, also known as Hassan Dhere, in neighboring Somalia.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and pretrial detention center conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. There were reports authorities physically abused prisoners in detention centers, military facilities, and police stations. Problems included gross overcrowding and inadequate food, water, sanitation, and medical care. Pretrial detention often occurred in police station detention facilities, where conditions varied widely and where reports stated there was poor hygiene and police abuse of detainees.

Physical Conditions: Severe overcrowding was common, especially in prison sleeping quarters. For example, in 2016 the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) visited a prison cell in Shoa Robit Federal Prison and found that its two small windows did not allow enough light into the estimated 430-square-foot cell, which held 38 inmates, allowing an average of less than 12 square feet per prisoner. Authorities sometimes incarcerated juveniles with adults. Prison officials generally separated male and female prisoners, although mixing occurred at some facilities. Medical attention following physical abuse was insufficient in some cases.

The government budgeted approximately nine birr (\$0.31) per prisoner per day for food, water, and health care, although this amount varied across the country. According to the World Bank, the country’s per capita GDP was 12 birr per day (\$0.41). Many prisoners supplemented this support with daily food deliveries from family members or by purchasing food from local vendors. Reports noted officials prevented some prisoners from receiving food from their families, and some families did not know of their relatives’ locations. Medical care was unreliable in federal prisons and almost nonexistent in regional ones. Prisoners had only limited access to potable water. Water shortages caused unhygienic conditions, and most prisons lacked appropriate sanitary facilities. Many prisoners had serious health problems but received little or no treatment. There were reports prison officials denied some prisoners access to needed medical care.

Visitors to political prisoners and other sources reported political prisoners often faced significantly different treatment compared with other prisoners. Allegations included lack of access to proper medication or medical treatment, lack of access to books or television, and denial of exercise time.

Administration: In July 2018 the government fired five federal prison officials following state media reports of allegations of abuse. There were reports prisoners mistreated by prison guards did not have access to prison administrators or ombudspersons to register their complaints. Legal aid clinics operated in some prisons. At the regional level, these clinics had good working relations with judicial, prison, and other government officials. Prison officials allowed some detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship, but courts sometimes declined to hear such complaints.

The law generally provides visitor access for prisoners. Authorities, however, denied some detained and indicted defendants visits with their lawyers or with representatives of their political parties. In some cases, police did not allow pretrial detainees access to visitors, including family members. Prison regulations across the country stipulate that lawyers representing persons charged with terrorism offenses may visit only one client per day, and only on Wednesdays and Fridays. Authorities denied family members' access to persons charged with terrorist activity.

Officials permitted religious observance by prisoners, but this varied by prison and even by section within a prison. There were allegations authorities denied detainees adequate locations in which to pray.

Independent Monitoring: The International Committee of the Red Cross visited prisons throughout the country during the year as part of its normal activities. The government did not permit access to prisons by other international human rights organizations.

Regional authorities allowed representatives of the government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to meet with prisoners without third parties present. The EHRC monitored federal and regional detention centers and interviewed prison officials and prisoners in response to allegations of widespread human rights abuses. The NGO Justice for All-Prison Fellowship Ethiopia (JPA-PFE) had access to multiple prison and detention facilities around the country.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. Authorities, however, detained persons arbitrarily, including activists, journalists, and opposition party members.

Law enforcement officers reportedly arrested and detained hundreds of suspects in the wake of the June 22 targeted killings in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa and the July 18 violence in Sidama Zone. On July 18, the independent rights group HRCO expressed its concern in a statement over arrests targeting opposition groups. The HRCO stressed

the detention of 102 members of NaMA, the OFC, and EZEMA, journalists and other individuals not only would affect the political parties and individuals but also represented a backsliding in the entire process of reform in the country.

The command post established in December 2018 in Western Oromia and the Benishangul Gumuz Region announced that it arrested 171 individuals from both regions in connection with the violence, deaths, and property loss associated with the conflict along the border area.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The constitution and law require detainees to appear before the court and face charges within 48 hours of arrest or as soon thereafter as local circumstances and communications permit. Travel time to the court is not included in this 48-hour period. With a warrant, authorities may detain persons suspected of serious offenses for 14 days without charge and for additional and renewable 14-day periods during a pending investigation. The courts allowed security officials to continue investigations for more than 14 days without bringing formal charges against suspects.

Under the ATP police may request to detain persons without charge for 28-day periods, up to a maximum of four months, during an investigation. The law permits warrantless arrests for various offenses including “flagrant offenses.” These include suspects apprehended while committing an offense, attempting to commit an offense, or having just completed an offense.

The law prohibits detention in any facility other than an official detention center, but local militias and other formal and informal law enforcement entities operated an unknown number of unofficial detention centers.

A functioning bail system was in place. Bail was not available for persons charged with terrorism, murder, treason, or corruption. In other cases, the courts set bail between 500 and 10,000 birr (\$17 and \$346), which most citizens could not afford. The government provided public defenders for detainees unable to afford private legal counsel, but defendants received these services only when their cases went to trial and not during the critical pretrial phases. In some instances a single defense counsel represented multiple defendants in a single case. There were reports that authorities allowed some detainees in pretrial detention little or no contact with legal counsel, did not provide full information on their health status, and did not allow family visits. There were reports officials sequestered prisoners for weeks at a time and placed civilians under house arrest for undisclosed periods.

Arbitrary Arrest: Authorities detained persons arbitrarily, including activists, journalists, and opposition party members. There were hundreds of reports of arbitrary arrest by security forces.

On July 11, intelligence officers in Addis Ababa arrested Christian Tadele, spokesperson for political party NaMA, while he was visiting arrested members of his party. On August 9, police told the court they suspected Christian of committing terrorist crimes. NaMA

claimed more broadly that government security forces arrested more than 500 members of the party in the wake of the June 22 killings in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa. This included the July 26 reported arrests of Belete Kassa, NaMA’s head of secretariat, head of political affairs Anteneh Sileshi, and its head of youth affairs Nigussie Yilikal. In August the OLF claimed security forces had arrested an unknown number of its leaders, members, and supporters in Oromia and only released some after they had undergone “political retraining.”

In September 2018 Addis Ababa city police detained 1,204 youths whom they suspected had a connection with the violence that occurred following the return of the OLF in Burayu. Police detained the youths at the Tolay Military training camp and provided them with a month of “re-education.” On October 18, police released 1,174 detainees. By year’s end the government did not report the status of the remaining 30 youth that police detained.

Pretrial Detention: Some detainees reported indefinite detention for several years without charge or trial. The percentage of the inmate population in pretrial detention and average length of time held were not available. Lengthy legal procedures, large numbers of detainees, judicial inefficiency, and staffing shortages contributed to frequent trial delays, in some cases for years.

Detainees’ Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: The law provides persons accused of or charged with a crime the ability to appeal. During the year no cases were brought to the courts by individuals claiming unlawful detention. The criminal law does not provide compensation for unlawfully detained persons.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary. Although the civil courts operated with a large degree of independence, criminal courts remained weak, overburdened, and subject to political influence.

Trial Procedures

Under the constitution accused persons have the right to a fair, public trial without undue delay, a presumption of innocence, legal counsel of their choice, appeal, the right not to self-incriminate, the right to present witnesses and evidence in their defense, and cross-examine prosecution witnesses. The law requires translation services provided in a language that defendants understand. The federal courts have staff working as interpreters for major local languages and are required to hire interpreters for defendants that speak other languages.

Detainees did not always enjoy all these rights, and as a result, defense attorneys were sometimes unprepared to provide an adequate defense. The courts did not always presume a defendant’s innocence, allow defendants to communicate with an attorney of their choice, provide timely public defense, or provide access to government-held

evidence. Defendants were often unaware of the specific charges against them until the commencement of their trials. There were unverified reports of authorities subjecting detainees to abuse while in detention to obtain information or confessions.

The federal Public Defender’s Office provided legal counsel to indigent defendants, but the scope and quality of service were inadequate due to a shortage of attorneys. A public defender often handles more than 100 cases and may represent multiple defendants in a single case. Numerous free legal aid clinics, primarily based at universities, provided legal services. In certain areas of the country, the law allows volunteers, such as law students and professors, to represent clients in court on a pro bono basis. There was no bar association or other standardized criminal defense representation.

The constitution recognizes both religious and traditional courts. Many citizens residing in rural areas had little access to formal judicial systems and relied on traditional mechanisms for resolving conflicts. By law all parties to a dispute must agree to use a traditional or religious court before such a court may hear a case, and either party may appeal to a regular court at any time. Sharia (Islamic law) courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims if both parties agree to use the sharia court before the formal legal process begins. Sharia courts received some funding from the government. These sharia courts adjudicated a majority of cases in the predominantly Muslim Somali and Afar Regions. Other traditional systems of justice, such as councils of elders, functioned predominantly in rural areas. Some women believed they lacked access to free and fair hearings in the traditional court system because local custom excluded them from participation in councils of elders and due to persistent gender discrimination.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Addis Ababa Police arrested and charged Frew Bekele, a professor at Rift Valley University, under the ATP, for authoring a book entitled *The Hijacked Revolution*. The book was highly critical of Prime Minister Abiy’s administration, claiming Prime Minister Abiy no longer represented the Oromo cause. Police confiscated the book from book vendors throughout Addis Ababa. Three brothers who ran a bookshop in the capital were also arrested. As of October police continued to detain Frew and two of the three brothers.

Local human rights organizations reported police detained more than 200 individuals for political reasons and detained close to 2,000 individuals in mass arrest roundups related to multiple incidents. The government claimed the arrests were criminal, not political.

Amnesty: In response to Prime Minister Abiy’s request to release political prisoners, parliament passed an amnesty law that lasted from July 20, 2018, until January 21. The federal attorney general reported 13,200 persons benefited from the amnesty law. The law granted amnesty for individuals and groups under police investigation, pending

trial, or convicted of political crimes including treason, outrage against the constitutional order, and armed struggle. Individuals convicted of genocide, extrajudicial killings, forced abduction, and committing torture were not eligible for amnesty.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The law provides citizens the right to appeal in civil court, including in cases with human rights violations. For rights violations where a government agency is the accused perpetrator, the victim initiates the process by filing a complaint at the EHRC. Parliament created the EHRC in 2000, and it continued to fund and provide oversight of the commission. The EHRC investigates and makes recommendations to the concerned government agency. Citizens did not file any human rights violations under this system, primarily due to a lack of evidence and a lack of faith in their ability to secure an impartial verdict in these types of cases.

On July 2, parliament approved the appointment of Daniel Bekele as commissioner of the EHRC. Bekele publicly called for “meaningful reform” of the EHRC and signaled his independence by criticizing the government’s continued use of the ATP.

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

The law generally requires authorities to obtain court-issued search warrants prior to searching private property. The law also recognizes exceptions for “hot pursuit” cases in which a suspect enters the premises or disposes of items that are the subject of an offense committed on the premises. This legal exception also applies when police have reasonable suspicion that evidence of a crime punishable by more than three years’ imprisonment is concealed on or in the property and a delay in obtaining a search warrant would allow the evidence to be removed. Moreover, the ATP permits warrantless searches of a person or vehicle when authorized by the director general of the Federal Police, his designee, or a police officer who has reasonable suspicion that a terrorist act may be committed and deems a sudden search necessary.

There were reports authorities dismissed opposition members from their jobs and that those not affiliated with the EPRDF sometimes had trouble receiving the “support letters” from their neighborhoods or wards necessary to obtain employment (see section 3, Political Parties and Political Participation).

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including speech and for the press. With the encouragement of Prime Minister Abiy, a number of new and returned diaspora media outlets were able to register and begin operations in the country.

Freedom of Expression: Upon taking office in April 2018, Prime Minister Abiy stated freedom of speech was essential to the country's future. NGOs subsequently reported that practices such as arrests, detention, abuse, and harassment of persons for criticizing the government dramatically diminished.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent media reported access to private, affordable, independent printing presses was generally limited to a single government-owned facility, which allowed government intimidation. Independent media cited limited access to a printing facility as a major factor in the small number, low circulation, and infrequent publication of news. State media moved toward more balanced reporting during the year, but strong government influence remained evident.

In Addis Ababa eight independent newspapers had a combined weekly circulation of approximately 44,000 copies; there were in addition two sports-focused newspapers. There were no independent newspapers outside the capital. Nine independent weekly, monthly, and bimonthly magazines published in Amharic and English had a combined circulation estimated at 27,000 copies. State-run newspapers had a combined daily circulation of approximately 50,000 copies. Most newspapers were printed on a weekly or biweekly basis, except state-owned Amharic and English dailies and the privately owned *Daily Monitor*. Government-controlled media closely reflected the views of the government and ruling EPRDF party. The government controlled the only television station that broadcast nationally, which, along with radio, was the primary source of news for much of the population. Two government-owned radio stations covered the entire country, 12 private FM radio stations broadcast in the capital, one FM radio station operated in the Tigray Region, and 49 community radio stations broadcasting in other regions. The state-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation had the largest broadcast range in the country, followed by the Fana Broadcasting Corporation, generally regarded as affiliated with the EPRDF ruling party. There were 31 licensed satellite television stations and 28 radio stations.

The law prohibits political and religious organizations, as well as foreigners from owning broadcast stations.

Violence and Harassment: The government's arrest, harassment, and prosecution of journalists sharply declined, and imprisoned journalists were released.

On February 23, Oromia regional police detained two journalists from the privately owned online news outlet Mereja Television. Reporter Fasil Aregay and cameraman Habtamu Oda were interviewing individuals displaced by home demolitions when they were detained. Following the detentions, a mob attacked the two journalists in front of the police station in Legetafo.

On July 18, security personnel in Hawassa, the capital of the SNNP Region, arrested Getahun Deguye and Tariku Lemma, managers of the Sidama Media Network, and two board members. Police released one of the board members unconditionally after a few hours while the rest remained detained under allegations they were involved in the July 18 violence in Sidama Zone.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Many private newspapers reported informal editorial control by the government. Examples of government interference included requests regarding specific stories and calls from government officials concerning articles perceived as critical of the government. Private-sector and government journalists routinely practiced self-censorship.

Internet Freedom

The government periodically restricted and disrupted access to the internet and blocked various social media sites. Beginning on June 10, the government partially and then totally shut down the internet for a week for undisclosed reasons. Many speculated that it related to the administration of national school leaving examinations. Ethiopians continued to be able to access blogs and opposition websites the government unblocked in 2018. The government shut down the internet following the June 22 killings in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa. On June 27, the government partially restored connectivity while continuing to block social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter.

State-owned Ethio Telecom was the only internet service provider in the country.

The law on computer crimes includes some overly broad provisions that could restrict freedom of speech and expression. These included, for example, a provision that provides for imprisonment for disseminating through a computer system any written, video, audio, or any other picture that incites violence, chaos, or conflict among persons.

Authorities monitored communication systems and took steps to block access to Virtual Private Network providers that let users circumvent government screening of internet browsing and email. In September the website Axios.com alleged the government used spyware to surveil journalists.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom, primarily by controlling teachers' appointments and curricula. Authorities frequently restricted speech, expression, and assembly on university and high school campuses.

According to multiple reports, the ruling EPRDF, through the Ministry of Education, continued to favor students loyal to the party in assignments to postgraduate programs. Some university staff members noted that students who joined the party received priority for employment in all fields after graduation. Numerous anecdotal reports suggested inadequate promotions and lack of professional advancement were more likely for non-EPRDF member teachers. There continued to be a lack of transparency in academic staffing decisions, with numerous complaints from academics alleging bias based on party membership, ethnicity, or religion.

A separate Ministry of Education directive prohibits private universities from offering degree programs in law and teacher education. The directive also requires public universities to align their curriculum with the ministry’s policy of a 70/30 ratio between science and social science academic programs. As a result the number of students studying social sciences and the humanities at public institutions continued to decrease; private universities, however, focused heavily on the social sciences.

According to reports, there was a buildup of security forces, both uniformed and plainclothes, embedded on university campuses in anticipation of student protests, especially in Oromia, in response to student demonstrations.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly. On March 24, however, a group of youth in Bahir Dar interrupted a town hall meeting organized by the PG7. The youths reportedly forced their way into the meeting hall, took down banners with slogans of the party, and replaced them with their own messages. Government security forces did not stop the youths.

Authorities could not refuse to grant a permit for an event but could require changing the location or time for reasons of public safety or freedom of movement. If authorities require the group seeking to hold an event move to another place or time, by law authorities must notify organizers in writing within 12 hours of their request.

The EPRDF used its own conference centers and government facilities in Addis Ababa and the regional capitals for meetings and events.

The Baladeras Council, led by activist and journalist Eskinder Nega, canceled four planned public meetings over a period of three months. On March 24, the council canceled its planned meeting because police stated they could not be present to maintain the security of participants, despite the fact that the council had informed police a week in advance. One week later police canceled a meeting due to fear for the safety of Eskinder. Prime Minister Abiy’s press secretary offered to hold the meeting in the prime minister’s office. Twice in June, police stopped a planned press conference for Eskinder after the owner of the hotel where the event was to be held complained to police that he did not know the content of the press conference. Eskinder canceled a protest scheduled for October 13 to voice opposition to the backsliding of democracy in the country. The move to cancel the protest came after the Addis Ababa Police issued a statement on October 12 banning the gathering. Police also temporarily detained the protest’s coordinators. Eskinder told local media that his group submitted a notification letter to the city administration two weeks in advance of the planned protest.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for freedom of association and the right to engage in unrestricted peaceful political activity. In March a new Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSP), also called the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) law, was adopted to replace more restrictive legislation that had been in place since 2009. The new law allows civil society organizations the right to solicit, receive, and utilize funds from any legal source including the right to engage in any lawful business and investment activity in order to raise funds to attain their objectives. The new law removes limitations on engagement on policy advocacy, most notably in the human rights space.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/> (<https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>).

d. Freedom of Movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to IDPs, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern. At times authorities or armed groups limited the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate in areas of insecurity, such as on the country's borders.

In-country Movement: Throughout the year local media reported various Amhara-Tigray roadblocks operated by civilians, some of which were still in place as of September. While the roadblocks are not state sanctioned, both regional and federal authorities were unable to open the roads for free movement.

Foreign Travel: The government lifted a ban on the travel of workers to Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) as of October 2018, following the signing of bilateral agreements with those countries. The government had instituted the ban in 2013 following reports of abuse and complaints that employment agencies lured its citizens into working abroad in illegal and appalling conditions. The agreements obligate hosting countries to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of Ethiopian employees. The agreements also grant insurance for the workers and facilitate support from the government's representatives in the Gulf.

e. Internally Displaced Persons

According to data published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in August, the country had 1,645,867 conflict-affected IDPs, mostly in Somali and Oromia regions. In 2018 the number of IDPs reached as many as 3.2 million, according to unofficial estimates, with more than half of that number being displaced in 2018. In the

IOM’s latest Displacement Tracking Matrix, that covered monitoring through June, assessors could not access all areas of Gedeo/Guji and the Wellegas to count the number of displaced persons accurately. A majority of the displacements were a result of internal conflict, particularly interregional and interclan conflicts and property disputes that were exacerbated by a lack of governance. The IOM identified 518,334 IDPs caused by drought, flash floods, and landslides, mainly in the Oromia, Somali, and Afar Regions. Other factors, such as development projects, social tensions, and natural events, contributed to the displacement of 71,089 persons.

IDPs do not have uniform or consistent access to assistance, compensation, or livelihoods. Their ability to utilize basic services, such as health care or education, or participate in civic or political action, is limited by lack of access to documentation. In some instances the government strongly encouraged returns of IDPs without adequate arrangements for security and sustainability, leading to secondary and tertiary displacements. The government reportedly used food to induce returns.

In the area of Gedeb, in the Gedeo Zone of the SNNP Region, up to 80,000 IDPs did not receive assistance for three to four months due to the government’s restrictions on access. When the community of Gedeb refused to board buses to return to its home of origin, the government deployed significant numbers of military personnel to ensure their return and to assist with the dismantling of sites. The government claimed it deployed military personnel to protect the IDPs from those who wanted to discourage them from getting on buses. In East and West Wellega, IDPs cited safety and security concerns as their main reasons for not wishing to return home. In some areas, beginning at least a month prior a phase of IDP returns in May, the government used the discontinuation of assistance, including dismantling of sites in displacement areas as a means to induce IDPs to return to their areas of origin. NGO partners reported the government restricted or suspended the NGOs’ ability to deliver assistance to hundreds of thousands of IDPs. Severe acute malnutrition spiked among this group of IDPs, and the government moved them after only one round of assistance, threatening the viability of the lifesaving treatment. According to humanitarian NGO partners, not all of the government-initiated returns of IDPs were considered safe, voluntary, or dignified.

In West Wellega, NGO partners and authorities reported in August that IDPs returned to the Kamashi Zone were returning to IDP sites, citing persistent insecurity and limited access to their former land as well as to shelter and essential services. Government authorities reportedly did not allow partners to assist these IDPs arguing that doing so would create a “pull factor.” Additionally, the government was unwilling to identify these IDPs as displaced, thus eliminating the possibility for needs-based humanitarian responses. In the Wellegas, the government was responsible for food delivery and initially provided inconsistent and inadequate assistance, which it subsequently discontinued.

Monitoring undertaken by NGO protection partners in July reconfirmed that authorities continued to deny humanitarian assistance to persons who had not returned to their home of origin. The government-initiated joint targeting exercise undertaken in Gedeo and West Guji was intended to identify persons in need, regardless of status, but those IDPs who remained displaced were not captured in the assessment, due to both

implementation constraints and access constraints. The government in Gedeo acknowledged exclusion of IDPs in the targeting exercise, although it did not facilitate assistance for all displaced persons.

f. Protection of Refugees

As of July the country hosted 655,105 refugees. Major countries of origin were South Sudan (303,733), Somalia (175,961), Eritrea (100,566), and Sudan (50,777).

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government used a refugee-status-determination system for providing services and protection to refugees.

Employment: On January 17, parliament passed a law greatly expanding the rights of refugees hosted in the country. The Refugee Proclamation grants refugees the right to work, access primary education and financial institutions, obtain drivers' licenses, and register births, marriages, and deaths. The law provides neither guidance on how the right to work will be implemented in practice, nor who will be eligible.

Durable Solutions: The government welcomed refugees to settle in the country but did not offer a path to citizenship or provide integration. Eritrean refugees were the exception, as they are eligible for out-of-camp status if they are sponsored by an Ethiopian citizen to leave the refugee camp. Refugee students who passed the required tests could attend university with fees paid by the government and UNHCR. In June UNHCR, UNICEF, the Ethiopian Vital Events Registration Agency, and the Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) opened the first one-stop-shop in the Bambasi Refugee Camp in Benishangul-Gumuz for refugees to register births, marriages, divorces, and deaths and receive protection referrals and civil documentation in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

In July UNHCR and ARRA completed a comprehensive Level 3 registration exercise for refugees in the country. The number of recorded refugees decreased as a result from 905,831 to 655,105. Registration was available in Addis Ababa and in all 26 refugee camps. The reasons for the decrease in registered refugees included nomadic lifestyles so they were not present in the camps, removal of double-counted refugees or citizens who registered as refugees during an influx, and some spontaneous returns to South Sudan.

g. Stateless Persons

Not applicable.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The ruling party's electoral advantages, however, limited this ability.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2015 the country held national elections for parliament. Later that year parliament elected Hailemariam Desalegn to his first full mandate as prime minister. In February 2018 Hailemariam announced his resignation as prime minister, and in March 2018 the EPRDF selected Abiy Ahmed as the new chairperson of the party and candidate for federal prime minister. After an acclamation vote in parliament, Abiy Ahmed assumed the prime minister’s position in April 2018.

In the 2015 national parliamentary elections, the EPRDF and affiliated parties won all 547 seats, giving the party a fifth consecutive five-year term. Government restrictions severely limited independent observation of the vote. The African Union was the sole international organization permitted to observe the elections. Opposition party observers accused local police of interference, harassment, and extrajudicial detention. Six rounds of broadcast debates preceded the elections, with internal media broadcasting the debates generally in full and only slightly edited. The debates included all major political parties competing in the election.

Independent journalists reported little trouble covering the election. Some independent journalists reported receiving their observation credentials the day before the election, after having submitted proper and timely applications. Several laws, regulations, and procedures implemented since the contentious 2005 national elections created a clear advantage for the EPRDF throughout the electoral process. There were reports of unfair government tactics, including intimidation of opposition candidates and supporters. Various reports stated at least six election-related deaths occurred during the period before and immediately following the elections. The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has sole responsibility for voter education, and it broadcast radio segments and distributed manuals on voter education in many local languages.

In a preliminary election assessment, the African Union called the 2015 elections “calm, peaceful, and credible” and applauded the government for its registration efforts. It raised concerns, however, regarding the legal framework underpinning the election. The NEBE registered more than 35 million voters, and it did not report any incidents of unfair voter registration practices.

In August parliament decided to hold local elections in conjunction with the May 2020 national elections. The NEBE has not yet formally accepted parliament’s proposal to hold federal and local elections together.

Political Parties and Political Participation: In 2018 the government, controlled by the EPRDF, called on all diaspora-based opposition groups, including those in armed struggle, to return and pursue nonviolent struggle. Virtually all major opposition groups, including the OLF, the Oromo Democratic Front, the ONLF, and PG7, welcomed the request and returned to the country. The parties that returned and newly formed parties continued to operate in the country. Some parties including the OLF, NaMA, the

Tigrayan Alliance for National Democracy (TAND), and the OFC, reported they were unable to open or run offices in certain parts of the country due to instability as well as harassment, intimidation, and attacks on their members.

In December Prime Minister Abiy disintegrated the EPRDF and created the Prosperity Party to distance the ruling party from ethnic politics and to promote economic growth. Former EPRDF coalition partner the Tigrayan Peoples’ Liberation Front refused to join the new party.

TAND reported that Tigrayan regional police detained and attempted to kill their party chair Aregawi Berhe while he was attending a funeral in Mekelle on June 26. Aregawi claimed that a group of youths attempted to assault him. Police then intervened and detained him in a prison in Kuiha overnight without explanation. Later, four police officers took Amanuel Wolde Libanos, another TAND member, to the forest and forcefully poisoned him. Amanuel survived the attack.

Constituent parties of the EPRDF conferred advantages upon their members; the party directly owned many businesses and allegedly awarded jobs and business contracts to loyal supporters.

Registered political parties must receive permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices, with at least one major opposition party reporting it was able to open many offices during the year in advance of the 2020 national election. Laws requiring parties to report “public meetings” and obtain permission for public rallies inhibited opposition activities. Opposition parties reported they rented offices and meeting halls in the Amhara and Oromia Regions without major difficulty. EZEMA, however, stated it was unable to open offices in parts of Oromia due to security problems or obstruction by local government officials. There were reports unemployed youths not affiliated with the ruling coalition sometimes had trouble receiving the “support letters” from their wards necessary to obtain jobs.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws prevent women or minorities from voting or participating in political life, although patriarchal customs in some regions limited female participation in political life. There were improvements, but women remained significantly underrepresented across both elected and appointed positions. In October 2018 the prime minister announced a new cabinet with 10 female ministers, or half of the resized cabinet. Also in October 2018, Sahle-Work Zewde became the country’s first female president. Her appointment was in line with the prime minister’s stated goal of empowering women in his administration. In November 2018 parliament swore in the country’s first female Supreme Court president. In the national parliament, women held 39 percent of seats, 211 of 547.

The government’s policy of ethnic federalism led to the creation of individual constituencies to provide for representation of all major ethnic groups in the House of the Federation (the upper chamber of parliament). The government recognizes more than 80 ethnicities, and the constitution requires that at least one member represent each “Nation, Nationality, and People” in the House of the Federation.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for conviction of corruption. The government did not implement the law effectively or comprehensively.

Corruption: Corruption, especially the solicitation of bribes, including police and judicial corruption, remained a problem. Some stakeholders believed government officials manipulated the land allocation process and state- or party-owned businesses received preferential access to prime land leases and credit. The law mandates that the attorney general investigate and prosecute corruption cases.

In January 2017 former prime minister Hailemariam announced the establishment of the Corruption Directorate within the Federal Police Commission with powers to investigate systemic corruption cases. The government’s rationale in establishing the investigation bureau was to increase transparency throughout the government bureaucracy. On January 23, Amhara regional police, with the support of federal police, arrested Bereket Simon on corruption charges associated with mismanagement of the Tired Endowment in his capacity as board chairman. On May 7, the federal attorney general charged former NISS director Getachew Assefa with grand corruption under the Corruption Crimes Proclamation.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires all government officials and employees to register their wealth and personal property. The law includes financial and criminal sanctions for noncompliance. The Federal Ethics and Anticorruption Commission holds financial disclosure records. By law any person who seeks access to these records may make a request in writing; access to information on family assets may be restricted unless the commission deems the disclosure necessary.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

On February 5, parliament approved a heavily revised, and strengthened, CSP (Proclamation No. 1113/2019) commonly referred to as the CSO law. The new law removes restrictions that had severely limited foreign government and private sector funding to any advocacy civil society organization. The law also permits foreign volunteers to work in CSOs for up to one year.

During the year a few domestic human rights groups operated. The resource-challenged HRCO is the country’s sole local, independent human rights group with investigative capabilities. It is a membership-based, nonpartisan, nongovernmental, and not-for-profit entity. It has submitted more than 100 reports since it was formed in 1991. Its reports during the year documented ethnically motivated attacks, clashes, and displacement.

The government was generally distrustful and wary of domestic and international human rights groups and observers, but that attitude and distrust appeared to be changing. State-controlled media were critical of international human rights groups

such as Human Rights Watch. In August 2018 four local charities and rights organizations launched a new rights group, the Consortium of Ethiopian Rights Organizations, which focuses on advocacy for human rights groups and broader space for rights-advocacy groups to operate.

In July the former diaspora-based rights group, the Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa, began operations in the country after registering under the new CSO law. In July the Ethiopian Human Rights Project, previously an offshore rights group, returned to the country and registered as the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy to work on rights awareness creation, monitoring and advocacy for democratization, and respect of human rights. In January the federal Charities and Societies Agency registered and licensed a newly formed local rights group, Lawyers for Human Rights.

The government denied most NGOs access to federal prisons, police stations, and other places of detention. The government did permit the JPA-PFE to visit prisoners; this organization had an exemption enabling it to raise unlimited funds from foreign sources and to engage in human rights advocacy. Some other NGOs played a positive role in improving prisoners’ chances for clemency.

Authorities limited access of human rights organizations, media, humanitarian agencies, and diplomatic missions in certain geographic areas. The government continued to lack a clear policy on NGO access to sensitive areas, leading regional government officials and military officials frequently to refer requests for NGO access to federal government authorities. Officials required journalists to register before entering sensitive areas and in some cases denied access. There were reports of regional police or local militias blocking NGO access to particular locations, in particular in locations with IDPs, for a specific period, citing security risks.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Office of the Ombudsman has the authority to investigate complaints of administrative mismanagement by executive branch offices and officials, including investigation into prison conditions. The office reported to parliament that it received 853 complaints between July 2018 and January, of which 455 were outside its mandate. It opened investigations into 488 cases and found no administrative mismanagement in 262 of them. The remaining complaints were pending investigation for six months in January. Parliament’s Legal, Justice, and Democracy Affairs Standing Committee rated the performance of the office as unsatisfactory.

The EHRC conducted research on the human rights situation and investigated human rights violations in the Somali and Oromia conflicts, as well as the conflict between West Guji Zone in Oromia and the Gedeo Zone in the SNNP Region. The commission did not publicize the findings of these reports. The EHRC reported its branch office in Jijiga resumed operations in September 2018, one month after a group of youth and regional security forces attacked it during the wide-ranging violence in August 2018.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

While the government’s political transformation contributed to a reduction in the number of deaths from engagement with government forces, violence between communities and among citizens began to rise.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, and conviction provides for a penalty of five to 20 years’ imprisonment, depending on the severity of the case. The law does not expressly address spousal rape. The law generally covers violence against a marriage partner or a person cohabiting in an irregular union without specifically mentioning spousal rape. Some judges interpret this article to cover spousal rape cases, but others overlook such cases. The government did not fully enforce the law.

Domestic violence is illegal, but government enforcement of laws was inconsistent. Depending on the severity of injury inflicted, penalties for conviction range from small fines to 15 years’ imprisonment. Domestic violence, including spousal abuse, was a pervasive social problem. According to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 34 percent of ever-married women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 had experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C is illegal, with punishment including imprisonment and a fine, depending on the crime. The government did not actively enforce this prohibition. The 2016 DHS stated that 65 percent of girls and women ages 15-49 were subjected to FGM/C. The prevalence of FGM/C was highest in the Somali Region (99 percent) and lowest in the Tigray Region (23 percent). It was less common in urban areas. The law criminalizes the practice of clitoridectomy and provides for three months’ imprisonment or a fine of at least 500 birr (\$17) for perpetrators. Infibulation of the genitals (the most extreme and dangerous form of FGM/C) is punishable by five to 10 years’ imprisonment. According to government sources, there had never been a criminal charge regarding FGM/C, but media reported limited application of the law.

For more information, see Appendix C.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: Marriage by abduction is illegal, although it continued in some regions despite the government’s attempts to combat the practice. Forced sexual relationships accompanied most marriages by abduction, and women often experienced physical abuse during the abduction. Abductions led to conflicts among families, communities, and ethnic groups. In cases of abduction, the perpetrator did not face punishment if the victim agreed to marry the perpetrator.

Sexual Harassment: The penal code prescribes penalties for conviction of 18 to 24 months’ imprisonment, but authorities generally did not enforce the law. Sexual harassment was widespread.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: All federal and regional land laws empower women to access government land. Inheritance laws also enable widows to inherit joint property acquired during marriage; however, enforcement of both legal provisions was uneven. Discrimination against women was widespread. It was most acute in rural areas, where an estimated 80 percent of the population lived.

Women’s access to gainful employment, credit, and the opportunity to own or manage a business was limited by their lower levels of educational attainment and by traditional attitudes. In July parliament revised the labor law to provide for four months of maternity leave. A number of initiatives aimed at increasing women’s access to these critical economic empowerment tools.

Children

Birth Registration: A child’s citizenship derives from the parents. The law requires registration of children at birth. Children born in hospitals were registered; most of those born outside of hospitals were not. The overwhelming majority of children, particularly in rural areas, were born at home. The government continued a campaign initiated in 2017 to increase birth registrations by advising that failure to register would result in denial of public services.

Education: The law does not make education compulsory. Primary education is universal and tuition free, but there were not enough schools to accommodate the country’s children, particularly in rural areas. The cost of school supplies was prohibitive for many families. The most recent data showed the net primary school enrollment rate was 90 percent for boys and 84 percent for girls.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was widespread. Uvula cutting, tonsil scraping, and milk-tooth extraction were among the most prevalent harmful traditional practices. *The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2013*, published by the African Child Policy Forum, found the government had increased punishment for sexual violence against children. “Child-friendly” benches heard cases involving violence against children and women. There was a commissioner for women and children’s affairs in the EHRC and Ombudsman’s Office.

Early and Forced Marriage: The law sets the legal age of marriage for girls and boys at 18. Authorities did not enforce this law uniformly, and rural families sometimes were unaware of this provision. The government strategy to address underage marriage focused on education and mediation rather than punishment of offenders. For additional information, see Appendix C.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The minimum legal age for consensual sex is 18, but authorities did not enforce this law. The law provides for three to 15 years’ imprisonment for conviction of sexual intercourse with a minor. The law provides for one year in prison and a fine of 10,000 birr (\$346) for conviction of trafficking in indecent material displaying sexual intercourse by minors. Traffickers recruited girls as young as 11 to work in brothels. Young girls were trafficked from rural to urban areas and exploited as prostitutes in hotels, bars, resort towns, and rural truck stops.

Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: Ritual and superstition-based infanticide, including of infants with disabilities, continued in remote tribal areas, particularly in South Omo. Local governments worked to educate communities against the practice.

Displaced Children: According to a 2010 report of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, approximately 150,000 children lived on the streets; 60,000 of them were in the capital. The ministry's report stated the inability of families to support children due to parental illness or insufficient household income exacerbated the problem. Research in 2014 by the ministry noted rapid urbanization, illegal employment brokers, high expectations of better life in cities, and rural-urban migration were adding to the problem. These children often begged, sometimes as part of a gang, or worked in the informal sector.

In July the Oromia Region Bureau of Women, Youth, and Children's Affairs and local police reported one incident of trafficking involving 31 IDP children. During the year protection partners received other reports of child trafficking in West and East Wellega and believed that traffickers set up a network to target IDP children.

Institutionalized Children: There were an estimated 4.5 million orphans in the country in 2012, 4.9 percent of the population, according to statistics published by UNICEF. The vast majority lived with extended family members. Governmental and privately operated orphanages were overcrowded, and conditions were often unsanitary. Institutionalized children did not receive adequate health care.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html> (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>).

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community numbered approximately 2,000 persons. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts, and the Addis Ababa Jewish community reported it felt protected by the government to practice its faith but did face limited societal discrimination.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/> (<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>).

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution does not mandate equal rights for persons with disabilities. The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities in employment and mandates access to buildings but does not explicitly mention intellectual or sensory disabilities. It is illegal for deaf persons to drive. The constitution provides: “The State shall, within available means, allocate resources to provide rehabilitation and assistance to the physically and mentally disabled, the aged, and to children who are left without parents or guardian.” This provision is under economic, social, and cultural rights, which mandates, not equal rights but allocating resources within available means.

The law prohibits employment discrimination based on disability and mandates affirmation action. It also makes employers responsible for providing appropriate working or training conditions and materials to persons with disabilities. When a person with disability acquires the necessary qualification and has equal or close score to that of other candidates, preference shall be given to the persons with disability during hiring. It also makes employers responsible for providing reasonable accommodation, appropriate working or training conditions and materials to persons with disabilities.

The law provides for a fine against an employer who fails to implement the law of between 2,000 and 5,000 birr (\$69 and \$173), and this makes the impact of the law on prohibiting employment discrimination based on disability almost zero.

The government took limited measures to enforce the law, for example, by assigning interpreters for deaf and hard-of-hearing civil service employees. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Public Servants Administration Commission were responsible for the implementation of employment laws for individuals with disabilities.

The law obliges all public buildings to have access for persons with disabilities but has no enforcement mechanism. This provision on access to public buildings only mentions those with physical impairment; it does not mention those with intellectual or sensory impairments. The law mandates building accessibility and accessible toilet facilities for persons with physical disabilities, although without specific regulations that define accessibility standards. Buildings and toilet facilities were usually not disability accessible. Property owners are required to give persons with disabilities preference for ground-floor apartments, and they generally did so.

According to a report from the UN Population Fund and the Population Council, one in every three girls with disabilities suffered at least one sexual assault. They also faced systematic and violent abuse at home and in their communities. The report stated many were blamed for being different and feared because they were seen to be under the spell of witchcraft.

Women with disabilities faced more disadvantages in education and employment. According to the *2010 Population Council Young Adult Survey*, 23 percent of girls with disabilities were in school, compared with 48 percent of girls and 55 percent of boys without disabilities. Girls with disabilities also were much more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse than were girls without disabilities.

Nationally there were several schools for persons with hearing and vision disabilities and several training centers for children and young persons with intellectual disabilities. There was a network of prosthetic and orthopedic centers in five of the nine regional states.

The labor ministry worked on disability-related problems, including ensuring impartiality in employment, provision of appropriate working conditions for public servants with disability.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The country has more than 80 ethnic groups, of which the Oromo, with approximately 34 percent of the population, is the largest. The federal system drew boundaries approximately along major ethnic group lines during the early years of EPRDF rule and the drafting of the current constitution. Most political parties remained primarily ethnically based, although the ruling party and one of the largest opposition parties were coalitions of several ethnically based parties.

In January the federal attorney general filed charges against 109 individuals suspected of involvement in the ethnically motivated violence in Burayu and surrounding towns in September 2018. According to the report, police detained 81 of the suspects while continuing to search for the remaining ones.

In September 2018 unknown assailants shot and killed four security officers in the Benishangul Gumuz Region. The incident triggered identity-based attacks on ethnic-Oromo and Amhara minorities in the region’s Kamashi Zone, resulting in the deaths of at least 67 persons and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. The perpetrators reportedly carried OLF flags, but OLF officials denied any involvement in the incident.

In June police in the Amhara Region arrested Debre Markos University students suspected of killing a fellow student on May 24. According to local press, attackers beat a student from the Tigray Region to death. Both the Amhara and Tigray regional governments condemned the killing and pledged to bring all the perpetrators to justice. On June 4, an attacker killed an ethnic Amhara student from Axum University in the Tigray Region in what most assumed was retaliation for the death in Debre Markos. The Tigray regional government condemned the ethnically motivated killing and promised to do all in its capacity to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Consensual same-sex sexual activity is illegal and punishable by three to 15 years’ imprisonment. No law prohibits discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. There were reports of violence against LGBTI individuals, but reporting was limited due to fear of retribution, discrimination, or stigmatization. There are no hate crime laws or other criminal justice mechanisms to aid in the investigation of abuses against LGBTI individuals. Individuals generally did not identify themselves as LGBTI persons due to severe societal stigma and the illegality of

consensual same-sex sexual activity. Activists in the LGBTI community reported surveillance and feared for their safety. There were no reports of persons incarcerated or prosecuted for engaging in same-sex sexual activities.

The AIDS Resource Center in Addis Ababa reported the majority of self-identified gay and lesbian callers, most of whom were men, requested assistance in changing their behavior to avoid discrimination. Many gay men reported anxiety, confusion, identity crises, depression, self-ostracism, religious conflict, and suicide attempts.

In May and June, Toto Tours, a Chicago-based tour company serving the LGBTI community, faced widespread backlash in the country when it advertised a 16-day “Treasures of Ethiopia” trip in October to visit a broad range of famous sites. According to the company, a flood of threats and hate messages prompted it to fill out a report on May 26 on a foreign government’s website. Average citizens called for an anti-LGBTI rally in Addis Ababa on June 9, although it did not take place. The company announced plans to cancel the tour due to the potential dangers visitors would face.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Societal stigma and discrimination against persons with or affected by HIV/AIDS continued in education, employment, and community integration. Persons with or affected by HIV/AIDS reported difficulty accessing various services. There were no statistics on the scale of the problem.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

On February 9, armed groups from the ethnic Qimant community attacked several villages near Gondar in the Amhara Region. Amhara Region officials said the nearly 300 attackers destroyed 300 houses and killed 30 persons. The violence reportedly created 50,000 new IDPs; the Amhara regional government issued a statement claiming the number of IDPs was beyond its capacity to manage. The ENDF arrested 138 persons in Western Gondar allegedly connected to the violence. Police charged 37 suspects with killings and 101 suspects with robberies during the attack. The ENDF also seized weapons, including rocket-propelled grenades, from those arrested.

Public universities witnessed violence fueled by ethnic tensions that severely interrupted the academic year in most universities.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The constitution and law provide workers, except for civil servants and certain categories of workers primarily in the public sector, with the right to form and join unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. Other provisions and laws severely restrict these rights. The law specifically prohibits managerial employees, teachers, health-care workers, judges, prosecutors, security-service workers, domestic

workers, and seasonal agricultural workers from organizing unions. The law requires employers guilty of antiunion discrimination to reinstate workers dismissed for union activities, and they generally did so.

A minimum of 10 workers is required to form a union. While the law provides all unions with the right to register, the government may refuse to register trade unions that do not meet its registration requirements. The law allows for refusing registration for a union due to the nonpolitical criminal conviction of the union’s leader within the previous 10 years. There were no reports of a refused registration on this basis. The government may unilaterally cancel the registration of a union. Workers may not join more than one trade union per employment. The law stipulates a trade union organization may not act in an overtly political manner. The law allows administrative authorities to seek recourse via court actions to cancel union registration for engaging in prohibited activities, such as political action.

While the law recognizes the right to collective bargaining, this right was severely restricted under the law. Negotiations aimed at amending or replacing a collectively bargained agreement must take place within three months of its expiration; otherwise, the prior provisions on wages and other benefits cease to apply. The law restricts enterprise unions to negotiating wages only at the plant level. Civil servants, including public school teachers, have the right to establish and join professional associations created by the employees but may not bargain collectively. Arbitration procedures in the public sector are more restrictive than in the private sector. The law does not provide for effective and adequate sanctions against acts of interference by other agents in the establishment, functioning, or administration of either workers’ or employers’ organizations.

Although the constitution and law provide workers with the right to strike to protect their interests, the law contains detailed provisions prescribing extremely complex and time-consuming formalities that make legal strike actions prohibitively difficult. The law requires aggrieved workers to attempt to reconcile with employers before striking and includes a lengthy dispute-settlement process. These provisions apply equally to an employer’s right to lock workers out. For an authorized strike, two-thirds of the workers concerned must support such action. If not referred to a court or labor relations board, the union retains the right to strike without resorting to either of these options, provided they give at least 10 days’ notice to the other party and the labor ministry and make efforts at reconciliation.

The law also prohibits strikes by workers who provide essential services, including air transport and urban bus services, electric power suppliers, gasoline station personnel, hospital and pharmacy personnel, firefighters, telecommunications personnel, and urban sanitary workers. The list of essential services goes beyond the International Labor Organization (ILO) definition of essential services. The law prohibits retribution against strikers, but it also provides for civil or criminal penalties against unions and workers convicted of committing unauthorized strike actions. If the provisions of the penal code prescribe more severe penalties, the punishment codified in the penal code

becomes applicable. Any public servant who goes on strike, who urges others to go on strike, or who fails to carry out his or her duties in a proper manner, to the prejudice of state, public, or private interest, is subject to imprisonment that involves forced labor.

The government did not effectively enforce the laws protecting labor rights. Despite the law prohibiting antiunion discrimination, unions reported employers terminated union activists. The law prohibits retribution against strikers, but authorities arrested nine air traffic controllers for striking. The government did not effectively enforce applicable laws, and penalties were not sufficient to deter violations. The informal labor sector, including domestic workers and seasonal agricultural workers, was not unionized or protected by labor laws. The law defines workers as persons in an employment relationship. Lack of adequate staffing prevented the government from effectively enforcing applicable laws for those sectors protected by law. Court procedures were often subject to lengthy delays and appeals. Labor officials reported that high unemployment, fear of retribution, and long delays in hearing labor cases deterred workers from participating in strikes or other labor actions.

Two-thirds of union members belonged to organizations affiliated with the government-controlled Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions. The National Teachers Union remained unregistered.

Although rarely reported, antiunion activities occurred. There were media reports that some major foreign investors generally did not allow workers to form unions, often transferred or dismissed union leaders, and intimidated and pressured members to leave unions. Lawsuits alleging unlawful dismissal often took years to resolve because of case backlogs in the courts.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor but permits courts to order forced labor as a punitive measure. The government did not effectively enforce the law, and forced labor occurred.

In 2015 the federal government enacted a comprehensive overhaul of its antitrafficking penal code. The code prescribes harsh penalties for conviction of human trafficking and exploitation, including slavery, debt bondage, forced prostitution, and servitude. The penalties served as a deterrent, especially when paired with increased law enforcement attention to the abuse. Police at the federal and regional levels received training focused on human trafficking and exploitation.

Adults and children, often under coercion, engaged in street vending, begging, traditional weaving of hand-woven textiles, or agricultural work. Children also worked in forced domestic labor. Situations of debt bondage also occurred in traditional weaving, pottery making, cattle herding, and other agricultural activities, mostly in rural areas.

The government sometimes deployed prisoners to work outside the prisons for private businesses, a practice the ILO stated could constitute compulsory labor.

Also see the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/> (<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>).

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor. The government did not effectively enforce the applicable laws, and penalties were not sufficient to deter violations.

By law the minimum age for wage or salaried employment is 14. The minimum age provisions, however, apply only to contractual labor and do not apply to self-employed children or children who perform unpaid work, who constituted the vast majority of employed children. The law prohibits hazardous or night work for children between the ages of 14 and 18. The law defines hazardous work as any work that could jeopardize a child’s health. Prohibited work sectors include passenger transport, work in electric generation plants, factory work, underground work, street cleaning, and many other sectors. Hazardous work restrictions, however, do not cover traditional weaving, a form of work in which there is use of dangerous machinery, equipment, or tools. The law expressly excludes children younger than 16 attending vocational schools from the prohibition on hazardous work. The law does not permit children between the ages of 14 and 18 to work more than seven hours per day, between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., or on public holidays or rest days.

Child labor remained a serious problem (see also section 7.b.), and significant numbers of children worked in prohibited, dangerous work sectors, particularly construction.

School enrollment was low, particularly in rural areas. To reinforce the importance of attending school, joint NGO, government, and community-based awareness efforts targeted communities where children were heavily engaged in agricultural work. The government invested in modernizing agricultural practices and constructing schools to combat the problem of child labor in agricultural sectors.

In both rural and urban areas, children often began working at young ages. Child labor was particularly pervasive in subsistence agricultural production, traditional weaving, fishing, and domestic work. A growing number of children worked in construction. Children in rural areas, especially boys, engaged in activities such as cattle herding, petty trading, plowing, harvesting, and weeding, while girls collected firewood and fetched water. Children worked in the production of gold. In small-scale gold mining, they dug mining pits and carried heavy loads of water. Children in urban areas, including orphans, worked in domestic service, often for long hours, which prevented many from attending school regularly. Children also worked in manufacturing, shining shoes, making clothes, parking, public transport, petty trading, as porters, and directing customers to taxis. Some children worked long hours in dangerous environments for little or no wages and without occupational safety protection. Child laborers often faced abuse at the hands of their employers, such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

Traffickers exploited girls from impoverished rural areas, primarily in domestic servitude and commercial sex within the country.

Also see the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings> (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>).

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin nationality, gender, marital status, religion, political affiliation, political outlook, pregnancy, socioeconomic status, disability, or “any other conditions.” The law prohibits discrimination in respect of employment and occupations, but authorities enforced these rights unevenly. The law specifically recognizes the additional burden on pregnant women and persons with disabilities. The penalty for conviction of discrimination on any of the above grounds is insufficient to deter violations. The government took limited measures to enforce the law. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV-positive status have no basis for protection under the law.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to women, who had fewer employment opportunities than did men, and the jobs available did not provide equal pay for equal work. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred against sexual orientation, gender identity, or both.

Discrimination against migrant workers also occurred.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national minimum wage. Some government institutions and public enterprises set their own minimum wages. Public-sector employees, the largest group of wage earners, earned a monthly minimum wage that was above the poverty line. Overall, the government did not effectively enforce wage laws.

The law provides for a 48-hour maximum legal workweek with a 24-hour rest period, premium pay for overtime, and prohibition of excessive compulsory overtime. Four conditions allow employers to make use of overtime work: urgency of the task, danger, absence of an employee, and lack of alternatives. Additionally, employers may not engage their employees in overtime work exceeding two hours a day, 20 hours a month, and 100 hours a year. The law entitles employees in public enterprises and government financial institutions to overtime pay; civil servants receive compensatory time off for overtime work.

The government, industries, and unions negotiated occupational safety and health standards, which do not fully address worker safety in many industries. Workers specifically excluded by law from unionizing, including domestic workers and seasonal agricultural workers, generally did not benefit from health and safety regulations in the workplace.

The labor ministry’s inspection department was responsible for enforcement of workplace standards. Occupational safety and health measures were not effectively enforced. The ministry carried out regular labor inspections to monitor compliance, but the government had an inadequate number of labor inspectors to enforce the law. The ministry’s severely limited administrative capacity; lack of an effective mechanism for receiving, investigating, and tracking allegations of violations; and lack of detailed, sector-specific health and safety guidelines hampered effective enforcement of these standards. In 2018 the ministry completed 46,000 inspections, and it was clear that responsibility for identifying unsafe situations resides with labor inspectors.

Only a small percentage of the population, concentrated in urban areas, was involved in wage-labor employment. Wages in the informal sector generally were below subsistence levels.

Compensation, benefits, and working conditions of seasonal agricultural workers were far below those of unionized permanent agricultural employees. The government did little to enforce the law. Most employees in the formal sector worked a 39-hour workweek. Many foreign, migrant, and informal laborers worked more than 48 hours per week.

Hazardous working conditions existed in the agricultural sector, which was the primary base of the country’s economy. There were also reports of hazardous and exploitative working conditions in the construction and industrial sectors, although data on deaths and injuries were not available.

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