

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	126
Land:	Etiopien
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	"Freedom in the World 2007"
Udgivet:	1. juni 2007
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	4. februar 2008



Freedom in the World - ↓ Ethiopia (2007)

Population:
74,800,000

Capital:
Addis Ababa

Political Rights Score: 5

Civil Liberties Score: 5

Status: Partly Free

Trend Arrow

Ethiopia received a downward trend arrow due to government repression of opposition protests.

Overview

In 2006, Ethiopia coped with the aftermath of disputed 2005 parliamentary elections, which saw a significant increase in the opposition vote, but which maintained the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in power. In the wake of the elections, more than 100 opposition leaders and civil society figures went on trial for alleged capital offenses, and the government further restrained the print media. Poor climatic conditions and the prospect of renewed violence with Eritrea over a long-running border dispute were also major issues of concern during the year. Meanwhile, late in the year Ethiopia sent troops into Somalia, which routed Islamist groups that had de facto controlled parts of the country.

One of the few African countries to avoid European colonization during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ethiopia ended a long tradition of monarchy in 1974, when Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a Marxist military coup. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam subsequently established a brutal dictatorship that was overthrown by a coalition of guerrilla groups, with leadership from the northern Tigray region, in 1991. Those groups were spearheaded by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), itself an alliance of five parties, and EPRDF leader Meles Zenawi headed the country's new regime as interim president.

The EPRDF government oversaw a transition period that resulted in the emergence of democratic institutions and a new constitution in 1995. In May 2000 national elections, the EPRDF won a landslide victory over a weak and divided opposition, after which Parliament elected Meles to a second five-year term as prime minister. Opposition parties and some observers criticized the government's conduct of the vote, stating that the polls were subject to government interference, that media coverage was significantly tilted in the EPRDF's favor, and that opposition supporters were subjected to harassment and detention. However, the opposition was able to engage in some criticism of the government in the media during the official election campaign, and a series of unprecedented public debates were broadcast over state-run radio and television.

A dispute over the border with neighboring Eritrea resulted in open warfare from 1998 until 2000. The Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), a mediating body, was established in the wake of the bloody conflict to draw a new border. It announced its decision in April 2002, laying out a boundary that assigned the town of Badme to Eritrea. The commission's judgments were supposed to be binding on both sides, but Ethiopia has continued to formally reject the EEBC decision.

The May 2005 elections for the powerful lower house of Parliament resulted in a major increase in opposition representation. The EPRDF and its allies won 327 seats, while the two main opposition parties took 161 seats, up from 12 seats in the previous Parliament. The governing coalition also won elections for eight of nine regional parliaments. Notwithstanding their significant gains, opposition parties argued that interference and fraud in the electoral process had deprived them of outright victory. Street demonstrations led to violence, excessive use of government force, and widespread arrests. Security forces killed 42 people and wounded more than 60 others. More than 4,000 people were arrested, including leading opposition figures, who were charged with capital offenses. The government subsequently imposed a ban on demonstrations in the capital and, in September, arrested additional opposition supporters.

In 2006, reverberations from the disputed parliamentary elections continued. Over 100 of the jailed opposition leaders, human rights activists and journalists went on trial in February, charged with crimes ranging from "outrages against the constitution and constitutional order" to treason and attempted genocide. Amnesty International considers the defendants to be "prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely on account of their nonviolent opinions and activities."

Guerrilla activity by the Oromo Liberation Front and other groups continued amid government intimidation of regime opponents, especially in the Oromo-dominated southern region. Scores of ethnic Oromos, especially students, were arrested in late 2005 and early 2006. The prospect of renewed violence with Eritrea was also a major source of concern during the year. Separately, Ethiopia sent troops into neighboring Somalia to protect its UN-backed transitional government from an Islamist militia that was increasing its control over parts of the country. By year's end these forces were poised to take control of Mogadishu, the Somali capital.

Because Ethiopia's economy depended on a fragile agricultural sector, the threat of drought and famine remained a potential source of instability in 2006.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Ethiopia is not an electoral democracy, but the presence of a significant elected opposition as of 2005 does mark a potential step forward in the development of the country's democratic political culture. In addition to fraud claims by the opposition, the European Union and other observers stated that the 2005 elections did not meet international standards. However, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, who led a team of observers at the polls, concluded that despite serious problems—including faulty voter-registration lists and significant administrative irregularities—the balloting essentially represented the will of the Ethiopian people.

The 2005 national election was the third since 1991. Previous elections included polling for local officials (1992), a Constituent Assembly (1994), and both regional

and national legislatures (1995 and 2000). These resulted in allegations from opposition parties and civil society groups of major irregularities, including unequal access to media, biased election officials, lack of transparent procedures, a flawed election law, and a partisan National Electoral Board.

The country's legislature is bicameral, consisting of a 108-seat upper house, the House of Federation, and a 547-seat lower house, the House of People's Representatives. The lower house is filled through popular elections, while the upper chamber is selected by the state legislatures. Lawmakers in both houses serve five-year terms. Executive power is vested in a prime minister, who is chosen by the House of People's Representatives. The 1995 constitution has a number of unique features, including a federal structure that grants certain powers and the right of secession to ethnically based states. However, the reality differs from what is constitutionally mandated, as the right of the people to select their government is seriously limited in practice. In 2003, the central government acquired additional powers to intervene in states' affairs when public security is deemed to be at risk.

More than 60 legally recognized political parties are currently active in Ethiopia, but the political scene continues to be dominated by the EPRDF. While some opposition parties argue that their ability to function is seriously impeded by government harassment, observers note that opposition parties have at times failed to comport themselves in a fashion consistent with a democratic political culture.

Ethiopia was ranked 130 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index. The government has taken a number of initiatives to limit corruption, but it has also been accused of participating in corrupt practices.

The news media are dominated by state-owned broadcasters and government-oriented newspapers. Opposition and civic organizations criticize slanted news coverage. A number of privately owned newspapers exist, but they struggle to remain financially viable and face intermittent government harassment. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 18 journalists are jailed for their work in Ethiopia. Three are serving lengthy sentences, while others are on trial for antistate crimes, and could face the death penalty if convicted. In its world press freedom review covering 2005, the International Press Institute specifically cites the Ethiopian government as failing to respect press freedom.

Press freedom groups have criticized a draft press law, saying it would further chill the media environment; the law was not enacted in 2005, but, in October 2006, the government said it would reintroduce it. The legislation includes restrictions on who may practice journalism; government-controlled licensing and registration systems; harsh sanctions for violations of the law, including up to five years' imprisonment; excessively broad exceptions to the right to access information held by public authorities; and the establishment of a government-controlled press council with powers to engage in prior censorship. In addition, cross-ownership of newspapers and FM radio stations would not be permitted. In 2006, licenses were awarded to two private FM stations in the capital. There is extremely limited internet usage, confined mainly to major urban areas.

Constitutionally mandated religious freedom is generally respected, although religious tensions have risen in recent years. The Ethiopian Coptic Church is influential, particularly in the north. In the south there is a large Muslim community, made up mainly of Arabs, Somalis, and Oromos.

Academic freedom is restricted. In recent years, student strikes to protest police brutality and various government policies have led to scores of deaths and injuries and hundreds of arrests. Student grievances include perceived government repression of the Oromo ethnic group. Many students were killed, injured, or arrested during protests against the May 2005 election results.

Freedoms of assembly and association are limited. A number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are active, but they are generally reluctant to energetically discuss issues and advocate policies that may bring them into conflict with the government. A draft NGO law, which the government said it would introduce into Parliament during the current session includes a provision permitting the government to arbitrarily close NGOs at any time, and is opposed by much of the civil society sector. In addition, in October the Ministry of Justice announced that it had established a new system enabling it to more closely regulate NGO activities.

According to the Workers' Group of the International Labor Organization (ILO), severe restrictions on the rights of trade unions exist in Ethiopia. The labor laws authorize only one trade union in companies employing more than 20 workers. Government workers in "essential industries," a term that is broadly defined, are not allowed to strike. The Confederation of Ethiopian Unions is under government control. The law governing trade unions states that a trade organization may not act in an overtly political manner. Some union leaders have been removed from their elected offices or forced to leave the country. All unions must be registered, but the government retains the authority to cancel union registration.

The judiciary is officially independent, though there are no significant examples of decisions at variance with government policy. The efficacy of police, judicial, and administrative systems at the local level is highly uneven. Some progress has been made in reducing a significant backlog of court cases. Human Rights Watch issued a report in 2006 stating that the Ethiopian government used intimidation, arbitrary detentions and excessive force in rural areas in the wake of election-related protests. In 2006, the government announced its intention to submit two antiterrorism bills to Parliament; one deals with the prevention and control of terrorist acts, while the second seeks to combat money laundering and the provision of financial support to terrorists.

The government has tended to favor Tigrayan ethnic interests in economic and political matters. Politics within the EPRDF have been dominated by the Tigrayan People's Democratic Front. Discrimination against and repression of other groups, especially the Oromo, have been widespread.

The government recently established a women's affairs ministry, and the Parliament has passed legislation designed to protect women's rights in a number of areas. In practice, however, women's rights are routinely violated. Women have traditionally had few land or property rights, especially in rural areas, where there is little opportunity for female employment beyond agricultural labor. Violence against women and social discrimination are reportedly common. Societal norms

and limited infrastructure prevent many women from seeking legal redress for their grievances. While illegal, the kidnapping of women and girls for marriage continues in parts of the country. General deficiencies in education exacerbate the problems of rural poverty and gender inequality. According to Save the Children, Ethiopia has one of the lowest rates of school enrollment in sub-Saharan Africa.