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Human Rights and Democracy: The 2011 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Quarterly Updates: Ethiopia

Quarterly updates: Ethiopia

Latest Update: 31 December 2012

While there has not been any significant worsening of democratic governance in Ethiopia during the last three months, the overall political environment remains poor.

The UK remains concerned about the continuing trials of national opposition leaders, Oromo opposition leaders and journalists arrested under Ethiopia's anti-terrorism laws. On 11 December, the Ethiopian Federal High Court sentenced Oromo opposition leaders Olbana Lelisa and Bekele Gerba to thirteen and eight years in jail respectively. The UK frequently discusses freedom of expression with the Ethiopian government.

Whilst the UK supports a well-regulated and accountable Ethiopian Civil Society, the UK is concerned that many Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are unable to comply with the strict interpretation of the Proclamation on Charities and Societies, as evidenced by the issuance of warning letters in November to over 400 (out of a total of around 2,700 registered) CSOs.

The UK is increasingly concerned by reports of arrests in connection to protests by Muslims in Ethiopia. Our Embassy also raised our concerns with the Head of the Islamic Supreme Council in December.

The UK is continuing to conduct regional visits in response to allegations of human rights abuses, including rape, mistreatment and forced movement, in relation to villagisation. The UK has continued to raise our concerns over the implementation of this programme with the Government of Ethiopia.

In November, DFID placed the report of their joint visit with USAID to South Omo in January 2012 in the House of Commons library. They will shortly finalise reports on other regional visits.

The British Embassy organised a range of events over this period, including a meeting with female activists, from 25 November to 10 December to raise awareness of the risks women and girls face in Ethiopia from gender based violence. Further details can be found on the [Embassy's website](#).

Quarter three update: 30 September 2012

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Over the past three months the UK has raised its continuing concerns with the Ethiopian authorities over the imprisonment of journalists and opposition leaders under Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP), including at the highest level. On 18 July, Mr Bellingham, then Minister for Africa, released a statement concerning the sentences handed down to independent journalist Eskinder Nega, opposition leader Andualam Arage and others <http://ukun.fco.gov.uk/en/news/?view=News&id=789687182>. On 11 September two Swedish journalists, who were jailed in December 2011 for supporting terrorism and entering Ethiopia illegally, were released as part of the prisoner amnesty for Ethiopian New Year.

The UK remains concerned about restrictions on freedom of expression. On 20 July, Ethiopian authorities seized copies of the independent newspaper Feteh and detained the editor, Temesgen Desalegn, although Mr Desalegn was later released without charge. The passing of a law in July restricting the ratio of advertising to news coverage risks indirectly affecting freedom of expression by making independent media commercially unviable. On 12 July Mr Bellingham raised closure of the media space with then-Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam.

The UK has also participated in multi-agency visits to different regions of Ethiopia to assess implementation of the government's "commune development" programme. The visits found no evidence of widespread human rights abuses, while access to education, water and shelter appeared to have improved in many cases. However, the scale, sequencing and timing of this programme remain of major concern, as do food security and land availability in some of the new locations. The report of the June 2012 multi-agency visit to Gambella has been endorsed by the multi-donor Development Assistance Group and will shortly be placed in the House of Commons Library, alongside the report of the earlier visit of February 2011.

In August and September, there were reports of civilian killings in the Somali region by the Special Police, as well as videos appearing on opposition websites implicating the Special Police in these and previous incidents. The UK has a long-standing concern over incidents of this kind in the Somali region. We promptly raised the allegations with the Ethiopian authorities and have urged a full investigation and prosecution of anyone found to be responsible.

Latest Update: 30 June 2012

We continue to observe the trials of those arrested under Ethiopia's anti-terrorism laws. We have also raised concerns over the freedom of the media and application of the Charities and Societies

Proclamation (CSP), whose provisions, such as restrictions on foreign funding, are causing severe difficulties for NGOs. We welcome the positive trends in social and economic rights highlighted in the Demographic and Health Survey – released in May – particularly those relating to the position of women and children.

The trials of the opposition leaders, Oromo opposition members, and journalists arrested under Ethiopia's anti-terrorism legislation are continuing. On 27 June, the Ethiopian Federal High Court convicted the independent journalist, Eskinder Nega, a recent winner of the PEN America's "Freedom to Write" award, the opposition leader Andualem Aragem and six others of participation in terrorist activity. Sentencing was adjourned until 13 July.

During her visit to Ethiopia from 22-24 April, Lynne Featherstone, the Home Office Minister for Equality and Criminal Information and the Ministerial Champion for tackling violence against Women and Girls, raised the impact of CSP on civil society with the highest levels of the Ethiopian Government.

Key achievements highlighted in the Demographic and Health Survey include a 47% reduction over five years in child mortality, a substantial increase in the use of modern contraceptives, and significant reductions in the age of first marriage, the fertility rate, and in the prevalence of genital cutting.

On 18 June, HRW published a report on alleged human rights abuses in the South Omo region, including the forced displacement of populations. We continue to take all such allegations very seriously. The UK is participating in a series of multi-agency visits to different regions to consider the implementation of the commune programme and resettlement (including last month to Gambella).
