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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 - Ethiopia

As highlighted in *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010*, the adoption of the Charities and Societies Proclamation Act of 2009 (NGO Law) has severely restricted the activities of most human rights organizations working in the country. The law also prohibits international organizations from engaging in human rights advocacy and governance work in the country, which has seriously limited the resource capacity of organizations working with minorities, such as the Pastoralist Forum of Ethiopia. According to HRW, the government claims that the legislation:

'is mainly intended to ensure greater openness and financial probity on the part of nongovernmental organizations. But instead it places such severe restrictions on all human rights and governance-related work as to make most such work impossible, violating fundamental rights to freedom of association and expression provided for in the Ethiopian Constitution and international human rights law.'

The law appears to be part of a broader strategy to suppress political dissent, limit fundamental human rights and freedoms, and control the populace.

Wider political repression in 2010 continued to affect minority communities, particularly those supporting the Oromo Liberation Front and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), whose leaders were detained, harassed or went into exile. In addition, despite the withdrawal of Ethiopian government troops from Somalia, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) used force to quell dissent in its own Somali region (also known as Ogaden). Minority women bore the brunt of the repression, with Amnesty

International reporting that there were 'cases of rape and extrajudicial executions by government forces of suspected supporters of the ONLF in the Somali Region of Ethiopia'. The struggle against international terrorism was given as the government's reason for cracking down on dissent, but the opposition insists that these actions are politically motivated.

It is worth noting that in June 2010, the Ethiopian government signed a ceasefire agreement in Germany with one faction of the ONLF. The ceasefire was expected to hold for three months to prevent further loss of life and facilitate a framework for future talks, and was renewed again in October 2010. However, given that the ceasefire was not signed by all the parties to the conflict, the hostilities continue.

Parliamentary elections held in May 2010 were won by Ethiopia's ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), with a large majority. The elections were judged free and fair by AU observers, but other international observers (such as EU observers) felt that they had fallen short of international standards, and had taken place within a 'narrowing political space', heavily skewed in favour of the incumbent. In such circumstances it is difficult for women from minority communities, especially those perceived to be from the political opposition strongholds of Oromo and Ogaden, to participate effectively, let alone be represented in national government and public affairs. For while women from those constituencies are likely to be targeted by security agencies for their assumed allegiance to opposition political movements, generally 'women are underrepresented in the Ethiopian political scene and within the electoral administration', as observed by the EU Election Observation Mission.

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