Ethiopia: Human Rights Factsheet

Introduction

Ethiopia is a landlocked country located in the conflict ridden Horn of Africa region. It borders Somalia and Djibouti to the east, Somalia and Kenya to the south, the Sudan to west and northwest, and Eritrea to the north. With a total area of 1,127,127 square kilometers, Ethiopia is one of the largest African countries. It is also the second most populous African country next to Nigeria with estimated 81 million people.

Ethiopia is a multiethnic and a multicultural country with over 80 different ethnic groups each speaking its own language. Among these, the Oromo constitutes 40%, the Amhara 25%, the Tigre 7%, Somali 6%, Sidama 9%, Gurage 2%, Wolaita 4%, Afar 4%, and other nationalities constituting 3% of the total Ethiopian population. In terms of religious identity, Ethiopia’s population is evenly divided between Christianity and Islam. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians account for about 40%, Sunni Muslim 40-45%, Protestant Christians 5%, with the remainder of the population adhering to other indigenous beliefs. The country is divided into nine ethnically divided administrative regions (Afar, Amhara, Benishangul/Gumuz, Gambella, Oromia, Somali, ...
Tigray and Southern nations) and two special city administrations located in the Oromia region (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa).  

**TPLF Grip on Power**

Since 1991, the government power has been in the hands of the Tigre Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), an ethnic Tigre rebel group established in 1975. TPLF was launched with the objective of establishing an independent “Republic of Tigrai” in the ethnic Tigre habited Ethiopia’s northern province. With the turn of events in the country and change of global politics, the rebel group assumed state power after the collapse of Ethiopia’s pro Soviet Union military government of Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam with the disintegration of communist bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The early years of TPLF rule were characterized by great optimism for the respect of the rule of law and human rights. The new government, within a short period of time, ratified a number of international human rights treaties. Four years after assuming power, it also

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7 The 1995 Ethiopian Constitution, Articles 45, 46 and 47. Also available at [http://www.ethiopar.net/](http://www.ethiopar.net/). Since the assumption of the state power by ethnic Tigre rebel group known as Tigre/Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1991, the Ethiopian state structure was overhauled. “Ethno federal” political structure where all reins of power remains in the hand of the TPLF rebel group which represents less than 7% of the Ethiopian population was established. Carl Skutsch, *Encyclopedia of the World’s Minorities*, Vol. I P. 440.

8 Merrera Gudina (2003), *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalism and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000*, Chamber Printing House, Ethiopia p.118. See also Zewde, Supra note 1, P.256-268

9 Id.


incorporated all government ratified international human rights treaties in the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution.\textsuperscript{13}

The constitution provides for parliamentary form of government with a ceremonial President as the head of state.\textsuperscript{14} All executive powers are vested in the hand of the Prime Minister who is the head of the ruling party.\textsuperscript{15} This post has been in the hands of TPLF leader Prime Minister Meles Zenawi ever since his party seized power.\textsuperscript{16} The Prime Minister is responsible for the appointment of all government ministers and heads of all government departments. He is also the commander-in-chief of the armed and national security forces.\textsuperscript{17}

The Ethiopian constitution provides for a bicameral Parliament consisting of the House of Federation and the House of Representatives.\textsuperscript{18} The House of Federation is the upper chamber with 108 seats whose members are chosen by the administrative regions assemblies to serve for five-year terms.\textsuperscript{19} The House of People's Representatives, lower chamber, has 547 seats.\textsuperscript{20} Its members are elected by from single-member districts to serve for five-year terms. Since its creation, both chambers are dominated by the ruling TPLF.\textsuperscript{21} The constitution also provides for

\textsuperscript{13} Supra note 7, see Chapter 3 Articles 13-44 of the Constitution.
\textsuperscript{14} Id. Article 45. After four years of consolidation of its power, the TPLF government engineered a parliamentary form of government where the chief executive will be elected through an indirect election by the ruling party to avoid the direct test of popular vote. This strategy enabled TPLF to keep its prime minister in power for the last 17 years under legal cover also it lost its legitimacy among the Ethiopian people. Merrera Gudina(2003), Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalism and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000, Chamber Printing House, Ethiopia p.131-132
\textsuperscript{15} Id. See also Article 72 of the Constitution.
\textsuperscript{16} Merrera Gudina (2003), Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalism and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000, Chamber Printing House, Ethiopia p.131-132. See also Stephen Sackur,HARDtalk ,interview with the Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, July 4,2005. Also available at \url{http://www.kinijitswiss.org/images/bbcmeles.PDF}
\textsuperscript{17} Supra note 7, Article 74.
\textsuperscript{18} Id. Article 53.
\textsuperscript{19} Id. Article  61, See also U.S.Central Intelligence Agency, World Facts Book: Ethiopia at \url{https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html}
\textsuperscript{20} Supra note 6. Article 54.
\textsuperscript{21} TPLF controls the legislative and executive bodies of the state while its military wing controls the national defense and policing. Merrera Gudina (2003), Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalism and the Quest for
the judicial branch. All Federal Courts judges are nominated by the Prime Minister and approved by the House of People's Representatives. This lack of independence between the Executive and the judicial branches has been detrimental for the existence of rule of law and respect for human rights in Ethiopia. Judges are appointed or dismissed from their posts on the basis of their political persuasion and party loyalty to the ruling TPLF.


The human rights crisis remained under reported as Ethiopia continued its downward spiral since the coming to power of the current government. In 1991, soon after the TPLF seized the state power, it dismantled the defense forces and government structure of the former government, and replaced them with TPLF forces and functionaries. Former government officials and employees were summarily dismissed. Thousands were detained, often without court warrant or any due process of law. After seventeen years, most of those former government officials still remain in detention waiting for a verdict on various charges alleged

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22 Supra note 7, See Chapter 9 Article 78 of the Constitution
23 Id. Article 81
26 See also Amnesty International (1993), Report: A detailed summary of human rights achievements and violations arranged alphabetically by country, P. 127-130
against them for crimes committed in the mid 1970s, during Ethiopia’s bloody years of turmoil known as “the red terror”.28

The remainder of the 1990s was characterized by violence against political opponents of TPLF, and members of other ethnic groups.29 In June 1992, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) which was part of the transitional government was forced out of the coalition government. Following this the government detained more than 37,000 Oromo political prisoners.30 According to the former Ethiopian President, Dr. Negasso Gidada, more than 25,000 of these Oromo political prisoners still remain in detention most without a day in the courts of law.31 In January 1993, the government security forces killed and detained a number of Addis Ababa University students who were protesting against the visit of the U.N. Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to Eritrea and Ethiopia on Eritrea’s planned referendum of independence.32 In April 1993, the government dismissed more than 40 professors at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia’s top and most influential University, who protested against the measures taken by

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30 This figure was an estimate of former International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) representatives in Ethiopia on anonymous condition. Amnesty International reported in its 1993 report covering the period from January to December 1992, reported the detention of 20,000 suspected supporters of Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and dozens of other government opponents. Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report: A detailed summary of human rights achievements and violations arranged alphabetically by country*, 1993, P. 127-130. In the same report it also indicated the detention of more than 2,000 senior members of former government officials.


government against their students.\textsuperscript{33} In subsequent years, students, numbers of Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA), Ethiopian Trade Unions, and civil and professional associations’ were subjected to consistent harassment, intimidation and dismissal from their jobs and detentions.\textsuperscript{34} In 1996 the government arrested and sentenced leaders of ETA on frivolous charges.\textsuperscript{35} In May 1997, Assefa Maru, Acting Head of ETA and Secretary General of Ethiopian Human Rights Council was assassinated.\textsuperscript{36} No investigation of the assassination was carried out.\textsuperscript{37} A number of leaders of these organizations and professional organizations fled the country and now live in exile. In 1996 alone, the government dismissed more than 600 judges from Oromia, Addis Ababa and Amhara regions.\textsuperscript{38} As the country remain closed to international and local human rights organizations, few cases of detention, torture, disappearances and extra-judicial executions of students, teachers, professionals and journalists throughout the 1990s were reported.\textsuperscript{39} The 1990s ended with the 1998-2000 Ethiopia-Eritrean border war with estimated

\textsuperscript{33} Id. More information is also available at http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ERORecords/HO/415/1/ind/eth4.htm

\textsuperscript{34} Id.

\textsuperscript{35} ETA top leaders including Shimalis Zewdie and Dr. Taye Woldesmayat were arrested. Shimalis died in 1999. Human Rights Watch, \textit{LESSONS IN REPRESSION: VIOLATIONS OF Academic Freedom in Ethiopia}, 2003, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{36} ETA top leaders including Shimalis Zewdie and Dr. Taye Woldesmayat were arrested. Shimalis died in 1999. Human Rights Watch, \textit{LESSONS IN REPRESSION: VIOLATIONS OF Academic Freedom in Ethiopia}, 2003, p. 32. also available at http://hrw.org/reports/2003/ethiopia0103/index.htm

\textsuperscript{37} Id. P. 32-36. See also Ethiopian Human Rights Council report on the assassination of Asefa Marru at http://www.ethiopians.com/spec14.html

\textsuperscript{38} Id.


\textsuperscript{39} Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Oromia Support Group, Ethiopian Human Rights Council, the United States Department of State and other human rights organizations have documented and reported thousands of extra-judicial executions, torture, disappearances, mass killings of civilians and political opponents. The detailed reports all these organizations, which the writer reviewed very careful demonstrates the human tragedy in the making while the rest of the world remained indifferent. Most of the details of this findings could be accessed online at the respective website these organizations and institution. Reports of the less known Ethiopian Human Rights Council and the Oromia Support Group could be viewed at http://www.ehrco.org/ and http://oromo.org/ respectively.
human cost of 100,000 deaths, and deportation of tens of thousands of ethnic Eritreans from the country.

The Turn of the Century: Targeting Students and Communities

The human rights situations in Ethiopia worsened after the turn of the century. Between February-March, 2000, the government killed at least one and arrested more than 300 Oromo students who were protesting against government’s failure to extinguish forest fire which consumed Ethiopia’s less than 3% tropical rainforest mostly located in the Oromia region. In December 2000, close to 200 Addis Ababa University Oromo students, who protested against the use of derogatory words to humiliate the Oromo students over university campuses by TPLF agents, were arrested and beaten by the government security forces. In 2001, the government security forces killed more than 40 Addis Ababa University and high school students who were protesting for greater academic freedom in the country. During this protest more than 250 students were wounded by live bullets while more than 2,500 were detained including country’s leading human rights advocates. The government security forces responded with similar excessive brutality and use of lethal forces to put down high school, college, and university students around the country who demonstrated in solidarity with the cause of Addis Ababa University students.

40 University of Massachusetts Amherst, Modern Conflicts Data Base of death tolls available at http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/dpe/modern_conflicts/death_tolls.pdf
42 Id.
43 Id. See also WACHIRA KIGOTHO, Academics in Ethiopia are again under siege, The Chronicles of Higher Education, May 18, 2001
44 Id.
45 Id. P.25-31
In 2002, Oromo students protest against systematic educational and economic discrimination against the Oromo people were met with government security and military brutality resulting in a number of death and detentions. In 2003, Amnesty International estimated that the Ethiopian government has imprisoned and held incommunicado several thousand people accused of links with the OLF without charge. Amnesty has also noted numerous reports of extra-judicial killings of civilians by the police and the army in the Oromo region. In 2004 protest by Addis Ababa University Oromo students resulted in the detention, torture and summary dismissal of more than 350 University students. Other similar public protests all over Oromia region were brutally repressed leading to a number of death, detention and dismissal of students and teachers from schools. The government also detained top leaders of a local Oromo self-help community organizations including Mecha-Tulema Association (MTA), and banned the Organization. The government further responded by tightening control and monitoring the daily life of the people by establishing administrative units of control.

49 Id. See also Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Human Rights Violations Occurred During Clashes Between Students and Security Forces in Oromia Region, 76th Special Report, 5 April 2004 available at http://www.ehrco.org/Reports/special76.pdf
50 Human Rights Watch, Letter to the Ethiopian Prime Minister, September 8, 2004. According to Human Rights Watch, “On August 9, 2004, the Federal High Court ordered the release on bail of the leadership of Mecha Tulema, the oldest and most prominent Oromo community welfare association: President Deribi Demissie; vice president Gemenchu Feyera; treasurer Sintayehu Workneh; and secretariat member Wzo. Ayelu Atisa. Mecha Tulema and its leadership have been accused of providing support for the outlawed Oromo Liberation Front and engaging in in terrorism; upon his release, President Deribi reported being mistreated while in jail. We were dismayed to learn that the Ethiopian government then re-arrested all four on August 16, a week after their release.” As of April 2005, these four prominent Oromo civil society leaders were being kept in detention after having been released on bail and then quickly rearrested and eventually charged with new frivolous charges.
51 The Mecha-Tulema Association (MTA) was established in 1963 and played a leading role in building and nurturing Oromo communities in Ethiopia. Human Rights Watch, Lessons In Repression: Violations Of Academic Freedom In Ethiopia, New York, January, 2003
at lowest community and household levels. In the same year, more than 700 Oromo high school students who fled to neighboring Kenya were handed over to the Ethiopian government security forces by the Kenyan authorities. The whereabouts of those returned to Ethiopia remained unknown. Although a number of cases of death were reported by human rights organizations; the details of these killings, torture, disappearances and other ill-treatments of Oromo students, teachers, community leaders and civilian population largely remain uninvestigated.

In December 2003, the government security and military forces massacred more than 400 members of the minority Anuak ethnic group in Western Ethiopia. The motive behind the massacre of the Anuak’s by the government military and security forces remain unclear. However, some human rights organizations generally considered this as an act of genocide and ethnic cleansing by the TPLF government. Similar killings of civilians by the security and military forces were carried out in 2002 in Awassa against the Sidama ethnic group, in Ambo

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56 Id. See also Keith Harmon Snow, Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia: Tip of the “Golden Spear”, World War 3 Report, November 4, 2004

57 According to Human Rights Watch, “on May 24, 2002, security forces killed at least fifteen and perhaps as many as thirty-eight farmers demonstrating against a change in the administrative status of Awassa, the capital of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples State.” Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia: Police Firing on Unarmed Protesters, New York, June 11, 2002 available at http://hrw.org/english/docs/0000/00/00/ethiop4037.htm
against the Oromos,\(^58\) in Tepi\(^59\) and other towns in Oromia and Ogaden regions of the country. No investigations were carried out into these massacres, and the perpetrators remain at large.

**The 2005 National Election: New Stage of the Mounting Repression**

The year 2005 was another watershed in Ethiopia’s human rights and political history. The government held its first ever contested national election including opposition parties on May 15, 2005. The processes leading up to the election were largely credited as transparent and participatory by international election observers until the outcome was reversed and marred with fraud and violence of the ruling party against the opposition parties and the civilian population.\(^60\) The democratic process was terminated on the evening of the Election Day. Soon after the government realized that it had lost the election to the opposition parties in the capital and other part of the country, the Prime Minister declared a state of emergency suspending citizen’s fundamental human rights.\(^61\) He took control of the police forces, the military and the national security forces, and declared his party the winner of the election.\(^62\) What followed the Election Day was a national nightmare. In two public protests in June and November 2005, more than 193 civilians were killed by heavily armed security forces, more than 700 wounded, and 30,000 people including leaders of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD),

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\(^58\) Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Police Firing on Unarmed Protesters*, New York, June 11, 2002. According to Human Rights Watch, “the Awassa killings come shortly after police shootings in Shambu, Ambo, and other towns in Oromiya State, resulting in five acknowledged student deaths. Oromiya is Ethiopia’s largest and most populous state. A year earlier, police killed at least forty civilians and injured 400 others when they violently cracked down on student demonstrations at the capital’s Addis Ababa University. Rapid deployment forces of the federal and regional police also killed two at a meeting in Siraro Woreda in Oromiya last year”… See also Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent :Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia’s Oromia Region*, May 2005.

\(^59\) BBC News, EU wants Ethiopian 'atrocity' inquiry, July 16, 2002 available at \[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2131177.stm\]

\(^60\) For the most critical and comprehensive report of the elections see European Union Election Observer Mission, *Ethiopia: Legislative Elections 2005: Final Report*, Brussels, March 2006; less detailed but also critical in parts was Carter Center, *Final Statement on the Carter Center Observation of the Ethiopia 2005 National Elections*, Atlanta, 15 September 2005

\(^61\) Id.

\(^62\) Id.
journalists, development workers, community leaders, students and academicians were detained. On June 12, 2005 a newly elected opposition parliamentarian from the opposition Oromo National Congress, Tesfaye Adane Jara, was assassinated by government security forces. Subsequently a number of opposition parliamentarians and leaders fled the country. Those detained were charged with genocide against the Tigre ethnic group (the ruling party’s ethnic group), treason and other high crimes. The top leaders of the opposition CUD were released after nearly two years of detention and receiving sentence to life imprisonment due to international pressure.

In January 2006 Amnesty International reported the arrest of thousands of Oromo students (mostly from secondary schools). Human Rights Watch also reported continued detention, ill-treatment and killings of Oromo students throughout 2006 and 2007.

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64 Integrated Regional Information Networks, Ethiopia: US Condemns Use of Force as MP is Killed, 14 June 2005 See also supra note 60
69 Human Rights Watch, Letter to Ethiopian Ministers on Human Rights Violations Against Students: Federal Agencies Must Investigate Alleged Abuses By Police, February 20, 2007. In this letter Human Rights Watch urged the Ethiopian government authorities to stop several incidents of human rights violations allegedly committed by federal police officers against students in the towns of Dembi Dollo and Ghiembi in western Oromiya State where four students were killed and several other students were severely injured and hospitalized. In the same report it also indicated the detention of 30 to 50 students without charge in the central Dembi Dollo jail and in two district police stations. See also United States, Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005: Ethiopia.
A survey of human rights organizations reports on Ethiopia since 1991 shows the killing of 15,000 to 20,000 civilians by the military and security forces. Some estimates and researches show much higher number of extra-judicial executions. Justice Teshale Abera, President of the Oromia region’s Supreme Court, estimates 15,000 to 20,000 extra-judicial executions of civilians in the Oromo region of Ethiopia alone over the same period. Similar assessment of reports of human rights organizations since 1991 puts the number of political prisoners over 100,000. According to a Washington Post interview of former inmates, over 85% of these political prisoners are estimated to be Oromo political prisoners. The founder and former politburo member of the Tigre People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and a former Ethiopian Defense Minister, Siye Abraha from 1991 to 2001, estimates 99% of Ethiopian prisons are filled with Oromo political prisoners, and Ethiopian prisons speak Oromo language. According to study published by American Journal of Public Health, 69% of Oromo refugees re-settled in Minnesota are torture victims of the Ethiopian government.

**Attacks on the Freedom of the Press and Information**

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70 This moderate estimation was reached after comprehensive review of human rights reports documented by the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Oromia Support Group, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United States Department of State since 1991.

71 Ewen MacAskill, *Ethiopian judge tells of regime's massacres*, The Guardian, November 9, 2006 available at [http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1942844,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1942844,00.html)

72 This moderate estimation was reached after comprehensive review of human rights reports documented by the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Oromia Support Group, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United States Department of State since 1991.


Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press and free access to information, these rights are under serious attack in Ethiopia. According to Committee to Protect Journalists, Ethiopia is among the top jailors of journalists in the world.\footnote{Committee to Protect Journalists, Special Report 2006: Internet fuels rise in number of jailed journalists available at \url{http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2006/imprisoned_06/imprisoned_06.html}} Many journalists are in prison on frivolous charges of genocide, treason, and other high crimes.\footnote{Committee to Protect Journalists, News Alert 2006: Ethiopian political divide ensnares the press, March 2006, available at \url{http://www.cpj.org/news/2006/africa/ethiopia14mar06na.html}} Since 1991, hundreds of journalists fled the country. In 2006 alone, the Ethiopian government imprisoned 18 journalists, forced dozens of journalists into exile, banned eight newspapers, expelled two foreign reporters, and blocked all critical web sites.\footnote{Ethiopia, where the government launched a massive crackdown on the private press by shutting newspapers and jailing editors, leads CPJ’s top ten countries where press freedom most deteriorated in the last decade. Committee to Protect Journalists, \textit{Special Report} 2007 available at \url{http://www.cpj.org/backsliders/}} Ethiopia tops the list of countries on the International Press Institute Watch List, an organization monitoring repression of press freedom in the world.\footnote{International Press Institute, IPI Watch List, available at \url{http://www.freemedia.at/cms/ipi/watchlist.html}} As the repression continues, the government has effectively managed to ban all independent papers, blocked all websites and blog spots. According to OpenNet Initiative, in a country where only 0.2\% of the total population have access to the internet (the lowest in Africa), the Ethiopian government has been implementing a filtering regime that blocks access to popular blogs and the Web sites of many news organizations, opposition political parties, and human rights groups.\footnote{The OpenNet Initiative is a collaborative partnership of four leading academic institutions: the Citizen Lab at the Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School, the Advanced Network Research Group at the Cambridge Security Programme, University of Cambridge, and the Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University. See the report issued on Ethiopia in 2007 at \url{http://opennet.net/research/profiles/ethiopia}} It also prohibited text messaging by cell phones after the May 2005 national election.\footnote{U.S. Department of State, \textit{Country Reports on Human Rights Practices} (2006), March 2007. Available at \url{http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78734.htm}}
The government is also in the process of enacting more restrictive and harsh laws targeting journalists and the media.  

**Growing Armed Insurgency**

The government is also conducting intensive military campaigns against the rebel groups who took up arms resisting the repression in most regions of the country. Ethiopia now hosts a number of armed groups fighting for greater autonomy from central control. The Ethiopian Peoples Patriotic Front (EPPF) is operating in the Amahara region in the north-west part of the country. Most of the rebel group’s leadership is based in Eritrea, and cannot yet be seen as a serious threat to the Ethiopian government. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is operating in the Oromia region which encompasses roughly half of Ethiopia. The Oromo Liberation Front has led the most sustained insurgency against the government since 1992. The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) is fighting the government in the Somali-habited Ogaden region. Founded in 1984, the ONLF is ethnic Somali nationalists based in eastern Ethiopia, seeking self-

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84 Id.


86 The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), formed in 1974, was the first major Oromo political party representing the Oromo people who have been marginalized within the Ethiopian state structure. The OLF was forced to pull out of an interim government with the TPLF/EPRDF in 1992. See Supra note 78.
governance for ethnic Somalis in Somali region of Ethiopia. Other smaller rebel groups are also operating in the Southern Nations and Nationalities and Peoples region, Gambella and Afar regions. The few remaining opposition groups, like the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), who chose to participate in the peaceful political struggle continue to face persecution, detention, harassment and intimidation.

**Rising Number of Internally Displaced**

Ethiopia’s conflict-induced internally displaced people received little or no attention. In a bid to deny the existence of civil war and inter-ethnic conflict in the country, the Ethiopian government remained opaque about Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs). International organizations estimate the existence of more than 200,000 IDPs in the country. An estimated 62,000 remain displaced in the Tigray region as a result of the 1998-2000 border war with Eritrea. The remaining tens of thousands internally displaced are located in the Oromia and

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88 CUD consists of an alliance of the All Ethiopia Unity Party (formerly the All Amhara Peoples Organization) led by Hailu Shawal; the United Ethiopia Democratic Party/Medhin led by Admassu Gebechu; and Rainbow-Justice party led by Mesfin Woldemariam.

89 The UEDF is largely made up of a coalition of ethnically-based opposition groups with strong support in the ethnically diverse Southern Ethiopia. The UEDF coalition of 15 parties includes the Oromo National Congress (ONC), South Ethiopian Peoples Unity (SEPU), the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party (EDUP) and the All Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO). It is headed in rotation by the veteran opposition politician and academic Beyene Petros, leader of SEPU, and another academic, Merera Gudina, leader of the ONC. After the 2005 election the UEDF leadership and supporters were harassed, and their newly elected ONC MP for Negale Arsi, Tesfaye Adane Jara, was killed by police. Ethiopian Reporter, UEDF’s Executive Committee Relieves Dr Beyene, Dr Merera of Posts, Addis Ababa, 29 October 2005

90 OFDM is a newly established Oromo political party, just three month before the May, 2005 national election, led by Bulcha Demeksa - a senior statesman and political figure in the country.


Ogaden regions of the country. With the ongoing war in the Ogaden region, where the government conducts a scorched earth military operation against the ONLF, the number of internally displaced has increased sharply. In September 2007, the United Nations Humanitarian Assessment Mission to the Somali Region of Ethiopia recommended urgent measures to avert a potential humanitarian crisis that would affect more than 600,000 people.

The Invasion of Somalia

Ethiopia’s military involvement in Somalia since December 2006, with the tacit support of the United States to fight terrorist elements, has resulted in yet another humanitarian crisis and human rights violations. The number of civilian causalities of the Ethiopian invasion is very high. More than half a million people are estimated to have evacuated the capital city of Somalia as a result of the Ethiopian military involvement and subsequent repressive actions. The Ethiopian military has been implicated in a number of civilian center bombardments in violation of the Geneva conventions on the laws of war and other customary international law principles. These practices of the Ethiopian military are fueling further conflicts and instability in Somalia

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93 Id.
96 Human Rights Watch, Somalia: a failing counter-terrorism strategy (By Tom Porteous, London advocacy directors Published in Open Democracy,) May, 2007
97 Human Rights Watch, Letter to US Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates on Somalia: The Department of Defense should send a clear message to Ethiopia and other parties to the region's conflicts, New York, December 12, 2007. According to this letter, after Ethiopian forces supporting the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) ousted the Islamic Courts Union in December 2006, hundreds of civilians have been killed and up to 600,000 people are estimated to have fled the Maqdasho. The letter also noted increasing brutality toward civilians, including further summary executions and enforced disappearances of individuals by Ethiopian and Somali government forces. Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia and the State of Democracy: Effects on Human Rights and Humanitarian Conditions in the Ogaden and Somalia, Testimony at a Hearing of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, October 2, 2007; Human Rights Watch, Somalia: Mogadishu Clashes Devastating Civilians, New York, November 9, 2007
and the sub-region. According to Human Rights Watch, Ethiopian security and military forces are one of the most repressive and brutal security forces in Africa.

**Economic Disaster**

Despite massive inflow of international development and humanitarian aid, Ethiopia’s economic performance remains poor. Billions of dollars given in the form of humanitarian and developmental aid including the debt relief initiatives of the World Bank and International Monitory Fund through the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC’s) initiative over the last decade and half have failed to make meaningful change largely due to lack of good governance, lack of rule of law and the government’s ill conceived divisive policies which disfavor regions with larger population. In the United Nations Human Development Index Ethiopia ranks 169 out of 177 countries surveyed in 2007. In terms of human poverty, focusing on the most deprived in multiple dimensions of poverty, Ethiopia ranks 105th among 108 developing countries for which the index has been calculated. 81% of the country’s population (over 60

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102 Id.
million) is estimated to live below the poverty line of $2 per day.\textsuperscript{103} Corruption is widespread. Ethiopia ranks 137th out of 158 countries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index for 2005.\textsuperscript{104} Ethiopia is home to staggering orphan child population. An estimated 4.6 million as traditional family households are collapsing under the pressure of extreme poverty, HIV/ADIS and government repression.\textsuperscript{105} With a number of resistance forces operating in the country, Ethiopia is rated as 18th out of the scale of 60 in the failed state index.\textsuperscript{106}

**International Pressure**

Invariably, all international and domestic human rights organizations have documented the continued pattern of gross violation of human rights and mounting political repression in Ethiopia since 1991. The United States Department of State yearly human rights reports criticize Ethiopian government’s poor human rights records on regular basis. The European Union Parliament adopted numerous human rights resolutions condemning government’s political repression and gross violation of human rights. The United States Congress have held a number of human rights hearings on Ethiopia; and debated a number of human rights bills, none of which passed into law, which could have demanded the U.S. administration to condition its military assistance to the Ethiopian government on respect for the rule of law and human rights.


\textsuperscript{105} Indrias Getachew, Ethiopia: Steady increase in street children orphaned by AIDS, available at http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_30783.html

Yet, the country made no meaningful progress for the last decade and half as a result of these criticisms. Since 2001, the human rights situation in Ethiopia even deteriorated further. The Ethiopian government’s alliance with the United States on the “global war on terror” has mooted and subdued any the international pressure. These policies of ambivalence have created the environment for the Ethiopian government to continue gross human rights violations with impunity. The culture of impunity and defiance is growing and getting deep rooted. Patterns of violations are taking serious form. The Ethiopian government is now widely accused of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity; and practicing ethnic apartheid policy where an ethnic group which represents less than seven percent of the Ethiopian population exclusively controls everything.

In a bid to end these continued failure to take effective measure, the United States Congress is currently considering a Bill known as “The Ethiopian Democracy and Accountability Act-H.R. 2003.” The draft legislation was unanimously approved by the House of Representatives on October 2, 2007. The legislation seeks to condition United States economic and military assistance to the Ethiopian government on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The legislation also aims to encourage and facilitate the consolidation of peace and security, respect for human rights, democracy, and economic freedom. In the face of strong lobby from the Ethiopian government, the bill is yet to reach the Senate floor to pass into law.


Conclusion

International policies toward Ethiopia continued to be ill-informed, shortsighted and inconsistent. The rhetoric of promoting human rights and rule of law, and the greater good of the people and stability in the region are replaced with short term alliance with the ruling minority regime on the war on terror and countering the spread of Islamist militancy in the horn of Africa.

The Ethiopian government is playing well with this terror card. Despite an overwhelming record of gross violation of human rights and war crimes, both in Ethiopia and Somalia where Ethiopia’s army is fighting armed insurgency since 2006, the Ethiopian government continued to receive massive diplomatic, economic and military support from international donors. These policies are morally repugnant and bound to be counterproductive which will eventually backfire as it did in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and many other hot spots in the past. It is absolutely essential for the international community to change course. The international community must avert further crisis and humanitarian catastrophe in this conflict prone region by supporting the legitimate aspiration of the people in the region for rule of law, respect for human rights and representative governance.