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Ethiopia

Political Repression

Critics of the government party *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF) and those perceived to be critics of the government often are being labelled as members of "anti-peace" movement. They are being discriminated against, detained and at times tortured. The harassment of political opponents has led to a diminished organized opposition against the government party. In Ethiopia's region Oromia, where most Ethiopians live, activists and critics of rural administrations continue to be labelled members of the rebel Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Those accusations are often followed by imprisonment and torture. Across the country several thousand Oromos are currently detained as political prisoners. Since 2004 several hundreds of Oromo students have been forced to leave university because they criticised the government's harassment of their people.

In local and by-elections in April 2008 the EPRDF won almost all of the more than three millions seats. Before the elections members and supporters of the ruling EPRDF intimidated opposition candidates and supporters. Two leading opposition parties withdrew before the elections. Hundreds of political opponents are estimated to be imprisoned. In October / November 2008 more than a dozen leaders from opposition parties engaged in community outreach or opening new bureaus throughout Ethiopia were arrested. At the end of 2008 most of them remained imprisoned.

Freedom of Speech and Press

Though the Ethiopian constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, journalists, publishers and editors were often harassed, detained and prosecuted. E.g. on February 16 the publisher Maria Kadi Abafita of the *Al Quds* newspaper, its editor-in-chief Ezeddin Mohammed and Sheik Ibrahim Mohammad Ali who is the publisher and editor-in-chief of the Islamic Amharic weekly newspaper *Salafia* were arrested after they had published articles in which an education ministry directive on religious worship in schools. The newspapers' offices were searched by the police. Computers and printers were confiscated. After being detained for 26 days, they were released on February 29 on a bail of \$ 1,200. The case is still pending.

Several journalists are still in exile. There are only three private FM radio stations left that are not government-controlled. Political and religious organizations as well as foreigners by law are not allowed to own broadcasting stations. The government continues to restrict access to the internet and blocks Web sites of opposition groups such as the *Ogaden National Liberation Front* (ONLF).

NGO law

In January 2009 Ethiopia's government pushed a law through parliament last month that effectively curtails the work of local human rights defenders: Independent local activists will be labelled "foreign" if they receive more than 10 per cent of their income from abroad. Being designated "foreign" means that they are not allowed to engage in anything with regards to

justice, democracy, gender equality, childrens rights and the rights of handicapped Ethiopians. Thus the government protects itself from being scrutinised since it will use the law to control domestic dissent more tightly. In a poor country like Ethiopia most of the NGOs are reliant on foreign funding. The law concerns most of the 4,677 NGOs working in Ethiopia.

Human rights abuses in Somalia and Ethiopia's Somali region

Before withdrawing its forces from Somalia in January 2009, the Ethiopian military repeatedly committed war crimes. Ethiopian military in Mogadish used mortars, artillery and so-called "Katyhush" rockets against insurgents in populated areas. It did so indiscriminately, thus bombarding homes of civilians and often killing them. Residents of Mogadishu became victims of assaults, murder, rape and looting committed by the *Ethiopian National Defense Forces* (ENDF) who fought alongside Transitional Somali Government forces.

In Ethiopia's south eastern Ogaden region which is mainly populated by ethnic Somalis the government continued its military campaign against the separatist *Ogaden National Liberation Front* (OLNF), though on a smaller scale. Torture and arbitrary detentions continue. Food aid to the drought-afflicted region was diverted and used as a means to starve out areas hold by the OLNf. More than 150 persons accused of being OLNf members or relatives of OLNf members were executed in 2008. Access to the region is still restricted. The International Committee of the Red Cross is still evicted from the region. Independent journalists are banned from travelling freely. So far ENDF's conduct of the war in Somalia and the Somali region has not been investigated by courts.

Agriculture and foreign investors

The Ethiopian government has promised Saudi-Arabia hundreds of thousands of hectares of unutilised agricultural land for growing cereals. The Ethiopian agriculture ministry has identified so far close to two million hectares of land in the Oromia and Amhara regions as available land for foreign investors. It is highly probable that the food produced would leave Ethiopia because Ethiopians cannot compete with the prices foreign consumers would pay for it.