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Ethiopia's human rights situation since 2009 has been marked by a harsh intolerance for any criticism of government actions and a sharp decline in freedoms of expression and association. Critics of government policy continue to be subjected to harassment, arbitrary detention, and politically motivated prosecutions. Two repressive laws passed in 2009—the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSO law) and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation—have been used to decimate independent media and civil society organizations.

Political space has also constricted as the ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), has consolidated control, the EPRDF officially won 99.6% of the votes in the 2010 parliamentary elections after intimidating political opponents, restricting media, and ensuring political support through its control of access to government services and other resources. Over the past five years most legitimate political avenues for peaceful protest have been shut down and opposition leaders, civil society activists, and independent journalists have been jailed or forced to flee.

While Ethiopia's commitment to economic development is laudable and has brought some benefits, communities affected by certain programs—such as the “villagization” program in Gambella and the development of irrigated sugar plantations in the Lower Omo Valley—have experienced serious abuses such as forced relocations, inadequate consultation and lack of services in resettlement sites.

There has been little or no apparent effort to investigate or ensure accountability for these abuses or for past serious crimes by the security forces in Gambella, Somali Region, Oromia, and in the wake of the 2005 election protests.

Freedom of Expression

During the 2009 UPR process, Ethiopia rejected the recommendation calling for amendment of the Anti-Terrorism law. But Ethiopia accepted recommendations to take “measures to provide for free and independent media” and to “take steps to ensure civil and political rights are upheld, including freedom of expression and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention.” However, Ethiopia failed to implement these recommendations. Since the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation was passed in 2009, the government has used this repressive law to detain and convict journalists, political opposition supporters, and peaceful protesters for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association. Thirty-four people, including 11 journalists and at least 4 opposition supporters, are known to have been sentenced under the law since late 2011 in what appear to be politically motivated trials. The provision on pre-trial detention allows suspects to be held in custody for up to four months without charge, one of the longest periods in anti-terrorism legislation worldwide. The provision violates due process rights guaranteed under Ethiopian law and international law.

Blogs and Internet pages critical of the Ethiopian government are regularly blocked and independent radio stations, particularly those broadcasting in Amharic and Afan Oromo, are routinely jammed. Attempts by journalists to establish new publications are systematically restricted and in 2012 printing houses also came under threat for printing publications critical of the Ethiopian government. Ethiopia's journalists live in constant fear of threats, harassment and persecution should they publish anything that is critical of government policy. As a result, critical voices in Ethiopia's media are few and far between, and the independence of Ethiopia's media is at its lowest point since the EPRDF came to power in 1991.

Many governments have called for the amendment of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights expressed its grave alarm "at the arrest and prosecutions of journalists and political opposition members, charged with terrorism and other offences, including treason, for exercising their peaceful and legitimate rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association." Ethiopia has yet to address these concerns.

Freedom of Association

During the 2009 UPR, Ethiopia rejected recommendations from a number of states to repeal or amend the CSO law to bring it in line with international standards. But the government had accepted the recommendation to "ensure that the freedom of association is guaranteed in accordance with the provisions of article 22 of the ICCPR" and other general recommendation on freedom of association. However, since 2009, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of independent organizations working on human rights issues in Ethiopia. Few, if any independent organizations are able to investigate sensitive human rights violations or speak critically on Ethiopia's human rights record from within the country.

The CSO law delivered a terrible blow to independent civil society in Ethiopia. It is one of the most draconian laws regulating nongovernmental activity in the world and bars human rights activity, including work on human rights, governance, conflict resolution, and advocacy on women's rights, children's rights and the rights of people with disabilities, by any organization that receives more than 10 percent of its funds from foreign sources.

A vibrant civil society is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable progress on human rights and the rule of law. Since the law's adoption, Ethiopia's most important human rights groups have been compelled to dramatically scale down operations or remove human rights activities from their mandates, and an unknown number of organizations have closed entirely. Numerous governments have called for the repeal or substantial amendment of the law, citing its violation of fundamental guarantees on freedom of association.

Right to Peaceful Assembly

For the past two years Ethiopia has seen unprecedented public demonstrations by parts of its Muslim community, which constitutes at least 30 percent of the country's population. The protests stem from the Ethiopian government's insistence that the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs accept members from an Islamic sect known as al-Ahbash, and the government's efforts to impose the sect's teachings on the ethnically and culturally diverse Muslim community. The government also sought to influence the operations of the Awalia mosque in Addis Ababa.

In 2012 and 2013 Ethiopian security forces have harassed, assaulted and detained hundreds of these protesters. Particularly serious crackdowns occurred in July 2012 and August 2013. Journalists attempting to

report on the events have also been arbitrarily detained and beaten. At least 29 prominent Muslim leaders, activists, and others believed to have a role in organizing the protests were arrested in July 2012 and are being prosecuted under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. Since January 2013 the hearings have been closed to the public, including the media, diplomats, and family members of defendants.

Arbitrary Detention and Mistreatment in Custody

Ethiopia had accepted during the previous UPR to “promptly respond to complaints of harassment, intimidation or arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders” and to uphold the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention. However, Human Rights Watch has documented hundreds of cases of arbitrary detentions in Addis Ababa, Oromia, Gambella, and Somali Region over the past years. Students, members of opposition groups, journalists, peaceful protesters and others seeking to express their rights to freedom of assembly, expression or association are frequently detained arbitrarily.

Ill-treatment is common in detention, particularly in Addis Ababa’s Federal Police Crime Investigation Center, known as Maekelawi, where most individuals are held during pre-charge or pre-trial detention. Abuse and coercion that in some cases amount to torture and other ill-treatment are used to extract information, confessions and statements from detainees. Individuals are often denied access to legal counsel, particularly during pre-charge detention. Mistreated detainees have little recourse in the courts and there is no regular access to prisons and detention centers by independent investigators.

Lack of Accountability for Abuses by Security Forces

Ethiopian security forces have committed serious violations of international humanitarian law in at least three separate armed conflict situations over the past decade: in the Somali Region in 2007, in Somalia between 2006 and 2008, and in Gambella in 2003 and 2004. Human Rights Watch concluded that abuses committed by Ethiopian forces in Somalia amounted to war crimes, and that abuses committed in Somali Region and Gambella amounted to crimes against humanity.

The Ethiopian government routinely dismisses serious allegations of human rights abuses as unreliable or politically motivated. On a handful of occasions, the authorities have established investigations into large-scale abuses, including after allegations of crimes against humanity in Gambella in 2003, the post-election violence in 2005, and in response to a Human Rights Watch report documenting war crimes in the Ogaden area of Somali Regional State in 2007. The inquiry into post-election violence was the most credible initiative, but after the members of the inquiry concluded that police used excessive force against protesters, killing up to 200 people, the inquiry’s findings were altered and the authors of the report were threatened and fled Ethiopia. The 2008 inquiry into events in the Ogaden failed to meet basic standards of credibility and failed to find any evidence of serious abuses by Ethiopian security forces.

Ethiopia rejected recommendations during the 2009 UPR to investigate human rights abuses committed by security forces in the Somali Region.

Abuses in the Context of Development Programs

Human Rights Watch has documented abuses in the implementation of some of Ethiopia’s development programs. In 2009, in the lead-up to the 2010 elections, the government used donor-supported programs, salaries, and training opportunities to punish dissent and discriminate against political opponents—both real and perceived. Victims described being denied access to seeds and fertilizer, agricultural land, credit, food

aid, and other resources for development. There are insufficient monitoring provisions in place to ensure that development programs are not subject to discriminatory practices and do not contribute to abuses. The Ethiopian government has not conducted any meaningful investigation into any of these allegations.

Abuses have also been documented during the implementation of the “villagization” program in Gambella and in the Lower Omo Valley’s irrigated sugar plantations.

In Gambella, the implementation of “villagization”—whereby pastoral and semi-pastoral communities are relocated to new sites with improved services—has been marked by forced displacement, arbitrary detentions and mistreatment, inadequate consultation, and no compensation. People sent to the new villages sometimes found the land infertile and frequently had to clear the land and build their own huts under military supervision, while the promised services (schools, clinics, water pumps) were not in place when they arrived.

In Ethiopia’s Lower Omo Valley, around 200,000 indigenous peoples are being relocated and their land expropriated to make way for state-run sugar plantations. Residents reported being moved by force, seeing their grazing lands flooded or ploughed up, and their access to the Omo River, essential for their survival and way of life, curtailed.

The government of Ethiopia should be urged to:

On Freedom of Association, Expression and Peaceful Assembly

- Repeal or significantly amend the Charities and Societies Proclamation of 2009. At minimum, the government should repeal provisions of the law that directly infringe on the government’s human rights obligations. In particular, the government should:
 - remove the provisions that label local groups as “foreign” if they receive significant funding from sources outside Ethiopia, and eliminate restrictions on the activities of these groups;
 - remove the ban on non-Ethiopian groups carrying out work that touches on human rights, governance, advocacy and other key issues;
 - ensure a right of appeal and unfettered access to the courts for all organizations and individuals subjected to adverse decisions under the law; and,
 - immediately unfreeze the bank accounts of the Human Rights Council and the Ethiopian Women Lawyer’s Association.
- Repeal or significantly amend the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation of 2009. At minimum, the government should repeal provisions of the law that directly infringe on the government’s human rights obligations. In particular, the government should:
 - revoke articles 3, 5(b), 6, 20, and 23; and,
 - release all journalists, opposition members, and others indiscriminately detained or unlawfully imprisoned for their peaceful expression of their views under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation.
- Immediately halt the use of unnecessary or excessive force against peaceful demonstrators and other persons by security forces.

On Accountability for Abuses by Security Forces

- Launch or invite the establishment of independent inquiries into serious violations of international humanitarian law and other serious abuses by Ethiopian military forces in Gambella in 2003 and 2004, in Somali Region in 2007-2008, and in Somalia in 2006-2008. Ensure that all personnel responsible for serious abuses are appropriately and fairly prosecuted. Senior officials implicated, including as a matter of command responsibility, should be prosecuted regardless of rank.
- Ensure that benefits from development programs are available to citizens on a non-discriminatory basis, regardless of their political affiliation, religion, or ethnicity.
- Ensure that any development-induced displacement is carried out according to international best practice.
- Ensure that donors, independent human rights investigators and media have unimpeded access to the whole country, including Somali Region, Lower Omo and Gambella, to monitor human rights impacts associated with development assistance.
- Discipline or prosecute as appropriate all government and military officials, regardless of position, implicated in human rights violations associated with development programs.

On Human Rights Treaties and Cooperation with Human Rights Mechanisms

- Issue standing invitations to all UN special procedures, including the Working Groups on Arbitrary Detention and Enforced Disappearances, and the Special Rapporteurs on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Human Rights Defenders, Torture, Indigenous Peoples and the Right to Freedom of Expression and Opinion, among others, to investigate and report on allegations of serious abuses in Ethiopia.
- Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and fully align national legislation with all obligations under the Rome Statute, including by incorporating provisions to cooperate promptly and fully with the International Criminal Court and to investigate and prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes effectively in its national courts.
- Sign and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture.