

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

24 June 2016

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Ethiopia: Information on "1 to 5" groups in Ethiopia, including origin and purpose; whether citizens are required to participate in them; consequences for refusal (2014-June 2016)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Origin

Sources describe groups in Ethiopia called "1 to 5" [1/5, 1-to-5, 1:5, one-to-five, five-to-one] as a "governmental structure" (ODI Sept. 2015, 5), a "model" (*The Reporter* 30 May 2015), or a "network" (*The Guardian* 22 May 2015). An article by the *Guardian* states that the "'one-to-five' network," where one member would recruit five more, was responsible for the "massive expansion" in membership of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (*The Guardian* 22 May 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Structure, Purpose and Participation

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a researcher for Human Rights Watch described the 1 to 5 structure as having "a variety of forms": for instance, in some cases one person may monitor, mobilize, and/or train five others, while in other forms, one person may be responsible for monitoring five households (Researcher 30 May 2016). Similarly, the Ethiopian Satellite Television Service (ESAT), a "nonpartisan, independent media outlet established with a mission of promoting free press, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law in Ethiopia" (ESAT n.d.), also describes the system as involving one individual who is responsible for "monitoring the activities of five households" (ESAT 16 June 2015). *The Guardian* article states that the network has been "adapted" and "one public sector worker is now responsible for reporting on the 'developmental activities' of a group" (*The Guardian* 22 May 2015).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an assistant lecturer in political science at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, who has conducted extensive ethnographic research in Ethiopia, described the nature and practices of the 1 to 5 groups

as an attempt by the government to institutionalize "traditional" working groups practiced in some rural parts of the country, whereby peasants gather in groups comprising 5 or so (male) household heads to work their fields together, or construct/repair their houses, fences, etc. Work is made on a rotational basis [on different members' farms, for example]. (Assistant lecturer 20 June 2016)

The same source explained that in many rural areas, the "system has been presented to peasants as the institutionalisation of these working groups, but a political dimension has been added," noting that alongside agricultural work,

the convenor of the 1/5 makes speeches about governmental policies, calls for meetings, and asks the members about their personal activities. He asks questions aiming at assessing to what extent the peasants are receptive of government policies. ... Simply put, 1/5 is one of the canals through which daily lives are monitored, and individuals disciplined (Assistant lecturer 20 June 2016).

Without providing further details, the researcher stated that the form of 1 to 5 groups may vary depending on the region of the country in which they are present (Researcher 31 May 2016). Similarly, the assistant lecturer stated that there are different types, and that the functioning of 1 to 5 groups is very different from place to place, or even from one kebele [administrative division] to another (Assistant lecturer 20 June 2016). The researcher explained that the functions of 1 to 5 groups vary, and can be used for both "good purposes" and harmful applications (Researcher 31 May 2016). Sources report that 1 to 5 groups have a variety of forms and purposes, including the following:

- Communicating information on health and development down to the community level, and "in theory," communicating "grassroots concerns about programme or policy implantation" back up to officials (ODI Sept. 2015, 4)
- "Support groups" for farmers, youth, and women in rural areas "to deal with social, economic or administrative matters" (*The Ethiopian Herald* 23 Sept. 2015)
- Dissemination of training to small neighbourhood groups and raising community awareness of health and development issues such as child marriage, sanitation, and harmful traditional practices (ODI Sept. 2015, 5, 7)
- Election mobilization (Researcher 30 May 2016), or "mobilization" of the public to support the ruling EPRDF (*The Reporter* 30 May 2015; *The Guardian* 22 May 2016),
- Government surveillance (Researcher 30 May 2016; ESAT 16 June 2015) at the grassroots level (ESAT 16 June 2015), or monitoring of "anti-government behaviour" (Researcher 30 May 2016), or "social control" to help "entrench" EPRDF power (*The Guardian* 22 May 2016).

In relation to the use of 1 to 5s for development work, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *National Human Development Report for 2014* for Ethiopia states that a "Health Development Army," ["Women's Development Army"] consisting of over two million 1 to 5 peer networks nationwide, has been formed in order to meet priorities laid out in national plans for health and development [1] (UN 2015, 41). According to its report on community awareness in ending child marriage in Ethiopia, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), an independent think tank based in the UK that works on international development and humanitarian issues (ODI n.d.), states that "all women across the country" belong to the Women's Development Army 1 to 5 groups (ODI Sept. 2015, 4-5).

According to the assistant lecturer, "everybody is supposed to join" the 1 to 5 groups, but "the efficiency of the system depends very much on the local administrators' (qebelé chairman) ability to implement the programmes. The more zealous they are, the more people will be compelled to join in" (Assistant lecturer 20 June 2016).

According to Human Rights Watch, the 1 to 5 system "contributes to fears of speaking about sensitive issues outside one's closest circles" in the context of what the organization describes as a situation of "pervasive government surveillance" where there is a "fear of reprisals" (Human Rights Watch 15 June 2016, 52). According to a press release on the 2015 general elections, published on the website of the Semayawi Party (Blue Party) [an opposition party in Ethiopia (Amnesty International 2016, 155)], the 1 to 5 system is a "controlling system ... to undermine freedom of citizens, which is designed to make them forcefully vote for the regime otherwise threaten them [with punishment]" (Semayawi Party 29 May 2015). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015* states that there were reports of government intimidation of opposition candidates and supporters in the 2015 elections (US 15 Apr. 2016, 1).

3. Consequences for Refusal

The researcher explained that consequences for refusal to join a 1 to 5 group would depend on the type of group that is involved (Researcher 30 May 2016). He stated that if a person was part of a 1-to-5 group that existed for surveillance purposes, they may not be aware that they are part of it; however, if they were selected as the "one" to monitor others, then refusal would likely lead to the person being "labelled as opposition, leading to a suite of tests to show your loyalty, warnings, harassment, possible arrest, etc." (Researcher 30 May 2016).

The assistant lecturer stated that people do not usually "refuse" to join 1 to 5 groups, but instead may intentionally miss meetings (Assistant lecturer 20 June 2016). If a person stops attending meetings of the group, the potential for harmful consequences depends on the relationship between the participants and the convenor of the 1 to 5 group (Assistant lecturer 20 June 2016). He explained that missing meetings might be easier for rural people, but less so for townspeople or public servants (Assistant lecturer 20 June 2016). Furthermore, he stated that repeated absences or "voicing against these meetings almost inevitably leads to

disciplinary procedures," which can involve "harassment by the qebelé, refusal to renew the [member's] identity card or to complete any administrative procedure," or loss of access to public sector employment (Assistant lecturer 20 June 2016).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] According to Voice of America (VOA), the Health Development Army [or Women's Development Army] in Ethiopia aims to improve health practices in rural communities (VOA 20 Nov. 2013). The volunteers that comprise the "army" are "trained by the government's vast network of health extension workers to bring behavior change at the community level and whip up support for government health programs" (VOA 20 Nov. 2013).

References

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United Nations (UN). 2015. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2015. [National Human Development Report 2014: Ethiopia. Accelerating Inclusive Growth for Sustainable Human Development in Ethiopia](#). [Accessed 19 May 2016]

United States (US). 15 April 2016. Department of State. "Ethiopia." [Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015](#). [Accessed 16 June 2016]

Voice of America (VOA). 20 November 2013. Joana Mantey. "[Rural Ethiopians Spread Good Health Habits over Coffee](#)." [Accessed 23 June 2015]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Professor of African studies, Cambridge University; Professor of political science, Roskilde University; Assistant Professor of African studies, University of Florida; post-graduate researcher specializing in Ethiopia.

Internet sites, including: *Africa Confidential*; ecoi.net; Factiva; *Human Rights Quarterly*; *Political Handbook of the World*; UN – Refworld.

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