

# 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](#).

8 February 2017

**ZZZ105731.E**

Ethiopia and Canada: Information on the Unity for Human Rights and Democracy (Unity), including activities and requirements and procedures to become a member; whether they provide verification of the political activities of their members in Ethiopia; whether Ethiopian authorities monitor or regulate the activities of Unity members (2015-January 2017)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

### 1. Overview

According to its website, Unity for Human Rights and Democracy (Unity) [also known as Unity for Human Rights and Democracy Toronto or UHRD] "is a volunteer based, not for profit community organization, striving to empower Ethiopian-Canadians to advocate for Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance in Ethiopia" (Unity n.d.). Without providing further detail, a press release from the organization adds that its work focuses on the promotion of human rights and the rights of prisoners in Ethiopia and that it works alongside other Canadian human rights organizations (Unity 11 Aug. 2016). The press release includes the slogan "Free all political prisoners in Ethiopia" (Unity 11 Aug. 2016).

Sources indicate that Unity is based in Toronto (Unity 11 Aug. 2016; Ethiopian Media Forum 11 July 2016; Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017). According to sources, the organization was founded in 2007 and its head is Esayas [Essayas] Teshome (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017; Ethiopian Media Forum 11 July 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a lawyer and human rights activist based in Toronto, who identifies himself as a supporter of Unity for the last six years, specified that Mr. Teshome is the organization's general secretary and "has the executive and administrative role" (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the lawyer, Unity was formerly known as "Kinijit for Human Rights and Democracy" before changing its name to Unity for Human Rights and Democracy (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017). The same source indicated that Unity

was initially established in 2007 as a support organization for the former Kinijit for Democracy and Justice Party in Ethiopia. The organization was renamed when the Kinijit party in Ethiopia disintegrated/dissolved and another party called Unity for Justice and Democracy [P]arty (or in Amharic Andinet LeFitihena LeDemocracy) was born. (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017)

However, he added that

since prior to the 2015 national election and the systematic demise of Andinet party in Ethiopia, the Toronto based support group changed its mandate to being [an] advocacy organization with no affiliation to any

political party in Ethiopia. The organization supports any pro-democracy and pro-Unity part[y] in Ethiopia. (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

## 1.1 Objectives and Activities

Information provided on the website of Unity states the following:

The objective of our organization as set out in the Articles of Incorporation is to:

1. Raise awareness about the current political, economic and social problems in Ethiopia to the Canadian public, policy makers and government, and advocate for democracy and human rights.
2. Cooperate with like-minded groups and organizations to promote the development of democracy, human rights, free press, good governance, free market and national unity.
3. Raise funds from individuals, corporations and philanthropic organizations to financially support victims of political repression, political prisoners or their families and promote the cause of democracy and human rights.
4. Organize symposiums, workshops, and conferences and promote social and cultural activities that would promote the common historical and cultural heritage of all people of Ethiopian descent. (Unity n.d.)

The lawyer similarly indicated that

Unity organises meetings, demonstrations and workshops on various Ethiopian related issues [and] makes regular contact with Canadian policy makers to inform [them of the] current political situations in Ethiopia. Moreover, Unity facilitates meetings for executive members of legally registered political parties in Ethiopia, and human right advocates are regularly invited to speak to the Ethiopian community in Toronto. (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017)

The same source also stated that "the organization works in supporting families of political prisoners in Ethiopia regardless of their political affiliation," noting that "Unity has been providing financial support for six families of political prisoners," for which "it has organised several fundraising activities" (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017). He further added that Unity "works in collaboration with other sister organizations in North America and Europe" and co-produces Berhan Television, a TV show which airs on Rogers Cable (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017).

Sources report that in 2010, Unity took part in the organization of demonstrations against Ethiopian officials visiting Canada for a G20 meeting in conjunction with other Ethiopian diaspora groups (Ethiomeia.com 28 June 2010; Unity 27 Apr. 2010). According to sources, in the summer of 2016, Unity organized a work visit for Yikal Getnet, the chairperson of the Semayawi Party (Blue Party), which included public discussions on the situation in Ethiopia and meeting with Canadian government officials (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017; Ethiopian Media Forum 11 July 2016).

For information on the Blue Party, please see Response to Information Request ETH104974 of October 2014.

## 1.2 Membership

The website of Unity for Human Rights and Democracy states the following:

Membership to our organization is purely voluntary.

No one is coerced [*sic*] or encouraged to join our organization for any purpose.

We accept donations from any individual or organization for the purpose of our objective. (Unity n.d.)

According to the lawyer, membership in the organization "is open to anyone interested in advocating for human rights and rule of law in Ethiopia" (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017). The same source added that, according to his understanding,

when Unity was established, most of the members were Ethiopian Canadian citizens or permanent residents.

However, the demography is changing. Usually, most refugees from Ethiopia, who were working with political parties and human rights advocates, will contact the organization to continue their struggle to bring democratic change in Ethiopia (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017).

The lawyer further noted that

There is an application form to be completed by the new members. There is \$10 membership fee to pay for the office rent and other administrative expenses. Members are encouraged, but not required to actively participate in the activities of the organization. (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the lawyer, "[t]o the best of [his] knowledge, Unity does not have members in Ethiopia unless its members travel from Canada to Ethiopia" (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

## **2. Whether Ethiopian authorities monitor or regulate the activities of Unity members**

Information on whether Ethiopian authorities monitor or regulate the activities of Unity members was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The lawyer stated that "[t]here are stories of various members of Unity who tell us that their relatives o[r] friends were talked to or questioned or threatened after videos of their political activities were seen on YouTube or social media," and provided anecdotal details concerning the alleged monitoring of a supposedly confidential teleconference as well as the surveillance of a demonstration in Canada by Ethiopian officials (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017). In addition, the same source indicated that the government of Ethiopia "is aware that the organization raises money [for] opposition parties and human rights organizations in Ethiopia," noting that "Ethiopia has a very strict regulation on funds coming from the Diaspora for political parties and advocacy organizations" (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017).

The lawyer further stated that "even though most executive members of [Unity] are Canadian citizens, they will not travel or have never been in Ethiopia for the past 10 years, for fear of being detained, harassed or deported back to Canada" (Lawyer 6 Feb. 2017).

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

For information on the ability of the Ethiopian government to monitor and censor Ethiopian dissidents living in Canada see Response to Information Request ETH105729 of February 2017.

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.

## **References**

Ethiomeia.com. 28 June 2010. "[Toronto Witnesses Largest Ever Anti-Meles Protest Rally](#)." [Accessed 31 Jan. 2017]

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Unity for Human Rights and Democracy (Unity). 11 August 2016. "[Press Statement](#)." [Accessed 31 Jan. 2017]

Unity for Human Rights and Democracy (Unity). 27 April 2010. "[TPLF Cadre's Disgraceful Visit to Toronto](#)." [Accessed 31 Jan. 2017]

Unity for Human Rights and Democracy (Unity). N.d. "[Unity for Human Rights and Democracy Toronto](#)."

[Accessed 31 Jan. 2017]

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Ethiopian Advocacy Association; Ethiopian Association of Toronto; Researcher, Human Rights Watch; Unity for Human Rights and Democracy Toronto.

**Internet sites, including:** Abugidainfo.com; Addis Fortune; Amnesty International; Awramba Times; Ayyantuu.net; Center For Human Rights Documentation & Research, Columbia University; Durame; ecoi.net; Ethiopia – Embassy in Ottawa, Government Portal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ethiopia 360; Ethiopian Media Forum; Ethiopian News Agency; Ethiopian Review; Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio; The Ethio Sun; Factiva; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; MediaEthiopia.com; Nationtoday.news; *Political Handbook of the World*; UK – Home Office; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State; ZeHabesha.

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