

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](#).

26 May 2016

ETH105557.E

Ethiopia: Whether state security agents have distinguishing facial marks or tattoos (2014-May 2016)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information on facial markings of state security agents was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Tigray Online, an online Ethiopian media source, writes that people of the Tigrayan ethnic group use facial scarification as an expression of cultural identity, and this includes cutting small incisions in the person's temple as a child (Tigray Online 12 Dec. 2012). The same source notes that sometimes, these cuts can also appear on the eyebrows (ibid.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an assistant professor of African Studies at the University of Florida, whose research specializes in ethnic identity, religion, and politics in Ethiopia, explained that state security agents do not have facial markings, but that "Tigrayans often have carved out two short stripes at the side of one of their eyes ..., but that is something cultural. The fact that many Tigrayans are in the Agazi – the anti-rioting police – might have created this misunderstanding" (Assistant Professor 22 May 2016).

Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, a researcher for Human Rights Watch explained that "state security agents per se" do not have facial markings; however, "increasingly state security agents belong to the Tigrayan ethnic group" (Researcher 24 May 2016). The same source noted that

[m]any Tigrayan men and women have two parallel scars on their temples [close to their eyes]. In some cases, this [is] on the edge of their eyebrows. This scarification is done when they are very young, sometimes it is very noticeable, sometimes not so much. It is one of the easiest ways to physically identify a Tigrayan [person]. I am not aware of any of the other major ethnic groups of Ethiopia having these scars. Women and men, particularly from rural areas, sometimes also have a tattoo of a small cross on their foreheads. (ibid.)

Tigray Online similarly writes that "only the Tigray people [...] mark their faces with these small straight incisions side by side on their face" (12 Dec. 2012).

Further information on facial markings of security agents, including on the eyelids, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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

Assistant Professor, University of Florida. 22 May 2016. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Researcher, Human Rights Watch. 24 May 2016. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Tigrai Online. 12 December 2012. "[Face Marks as Expression of Cultural Identity](#)." [Accessed 25 May 2016]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: associate professor of history and anthropology of Eastern Africa, École des hautes études en sciences sociales; professor of development studies, University of London; professor of sociology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Internet sites, including: ecoi.net; Factiva; Minority Rights Group International; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State.

[Tips on how to use this search engine.](#)

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