

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#)[> Research Program](#)[> Responses to Information Requests](#)

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](#).

2 November 2016

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Ethiopia: Information on the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), including history, goals, and methods; whether the group uses violence and has participated in armed conflict; treatment of members by the authorities (2012-October 2016)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a lecturer in international development at the University of East London who has researched ethnic groups in Ethiopia, including the Sidama [1], characterized the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) as a "political organisation" that aims to "ensure Sidama peoples' national self-determination within the context of Ethiopia" (Lecturer 23 Oct. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a research professor at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, who has researched history and culture in the horn of Africa, particularly Ethiopia, similarly stated that the SLM is "ethnically based and has a primarily Sidama-limited agenda" (Research Professor 21 Oct. 2016). The same source described the SLM as an "old-style (1970's) 'liberation movement'," and indicated that the group is "rather small and not very significant" (ibid.). The Research Professor further added that although the "SLM claims to be the 'main voice of the Sidama people', [it] is not a big and flourishing organization," and that although it is part of the opposition, it has no representation in parliament (ibid.). According to the Lecturer, the SLM "claims to enjoy significant support within Sidama, although it is difficult to provide precise figures given [the] authoritarian political environment in Ethiopia" (23 Oct. 2016). The *Political Handbook of the World 2015 (PHW)* lists the SLM as a "[s]mall formation" (PHW 2015, 479).

According to the PHW, the SLM is led by Yilma Chamola (ibid.). Other sources identify Dr. Million Tumato as the chairperson of the SLM (SLM n.d.b; Lecturer 23 Oct. 2016). The Lecturer indicated that Tumato has been the SLM chairperson since 2009, and that he is "a public health expert" (ibid.). *The Reporter*, an Addis Ababa-based newspaper, notes that the party's head of public relations is Tilahun Endesahw (18 July 2015). Further information on the leadership and structure of the SLM could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A copy of the "SLM Political Program" and its "Vision, Mission and Goals," as posted on the SLM's website, are attached to this response (Attachment 1 and 2, respectively).

1.1 Medrek Coalition

Sources indicate that the SLM is part of the Medrek coalition (Research Professor 21 Oct. 2016; Lecturer 23 Oct. 2016; *The Reporter* 16 Mar. 2015), also known as the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (FORUM) (ibid.; Lecturer 23 Oct. 2016; PHW 2015, 475). The PHW notes that the word "Medrek" means "forum" in Amharic (ibid.). According to sources, the coalition consists of four parties: the SLM, the Oromo

Federalist Congress (OFC), the Union of Tigreans for Democracy and Sovereignty (Arena), and the Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Union (*The Reporter* 16 Mar. 2015; *Addis Fortune* 11 Jan. 2015). The PHW states that the Medrek coalition "advocates land ownership for farmers and economic improvement by bolstering manufacturing and services in the country" (2015, 475). Sources indicate the coalition was formed in 2008 (*Addis Fortune* 11 Jan. 2015) or early 2009 (PHW 2015, 475). Sources further state that the Medrek won one seat in Parliament in the 2010 elections (*Addis Fortune* 11 Jan. 2015; PHW 2015, 475), despite being the "most formidable opposition to the EPRDF [Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front]" with 421 federal legislative and 861 regional council candidates (ibid.). An article by *The Reporter* indicates that the Medrek did not win any seats in the 2015 parliamentary and regional council elections [2] despite having presented "the most number of candidates from opposition parties;" the coalition did however receive "64.3 percent of the votes (over one million) that went to the opposition" (*The Reporter* 17 Aug. 2015).

Information on the role of the SLM within the Medrek could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. History of the SLM

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior researcher from the Chr. Michelsen Institute [3] who has worked on the Sidama region and provided information based on her doctoral dissertation research covering the period of 2005 to 2008, stated that the SLM was founded in 1975 (Senior Researcher 24 Oct. 2016). However, the Lecturer stated that the movement was founded in 1976 (Lecturer 23 Oct. 2016). In his book *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, John Markakis, a professor of African studies who specializes in the political economy of Ethiopia (Markakis n.d.), states that the SLM was founded in 1977 (ibid. 2011, 200). According to the Research Professor, the SLM was founded in 1982 (Research Professor 21 Oct. 2016).

Sources indicate that the SLM was founded by Woldeammanuel Dubale [also spelled Wolde Emannuel Dubale] (Markakis June 2011, 200; Senior Researcher 24 Oct. 2016; Lecturer 23 Oct. 2016). The Lecturer stated that other founding members of the SLM included Roda Utala, Kebede Fokora, Amare Gunsä, Argata Gunsä, and Ginbo Basha (ibid.). Corroborating and additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Research Professor indicated that the SLM has its roots in the Sidama Liberation Front, which was involved in an armed struggle against the Derg [4] government (ibid.). The Senior Researcher also stated that the SLM was "a Sidama nationalist movement mobilizing against the Derg" that was involved in a "guerilla war against the government," first from peripheral areas of Sidama and later from Somalia during the 1980s (Senior Researcher 24 Oct. 2016). Markakis notes that after 1977, the SLM "established an armed presence in three *woreda* ... and managed to fight off the Derg until 1982[,] after which the insurgents were defeated, and the SLM leadership fled abroad (Markakis 2011, 200). According to the Senior Researcher, the SLM trained "approximately 5,000 soldiers" in Somalia, and had another 6,000 soldiers who were operating on Sidama soil (ibid.). Corroborating information on the number of SLM fighters active during the 1970s and 1980s could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the Lecturer, the SLM's "methods of operation [are] better captured by dividing [them] into two periods: The first is from 1976 to 1991 when it waged armed struggle against the military Derg government of Ethiopia from its base in Somalia," and the second phase from 1991 to the present where it has "opted for peaceful methods of struggle" (23 Oct. 2016). Similarly, the Senior Researcher indicated that the SLM engaged in armed struggle until 1991, after which it became a political party (24 Oct. 2016).

Sources stated that after 1991, the SLM had a presence within the transitional government with two representatives in the transitional parliament (Markakis 2011, 285; Senior Researcher 24 Oct. 2016). According to the Lecturer, the SLM was part of the transitional government until 1993-1994, when it became an opposition party to the ruling EPDRF (Lecturer 23 Oct. 2016). The Senior Researcher indicated that when the transitional government fell apart in 1992, the SLM left the government and its members were subsequently persecuted by the ruling EPRDF regime (Senior Researcher 24 Oct. 2016). The same source noted that in 2005, an agreement between the EPRDF and Dubale, the founder of the SLM, was reached, allowing Dubale to return to Ethiopia from exile (ibid.). According to the Senior Researcher, this caused a split within the SLM; the faction that broke with Dubale continued to be persecuted by the EPRDF government (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Activities of the SLM

The Lecturer stated that the activities of the SLM include raising political awareness among the Sidama, promoting its political agenda within the Sidama community, campaigning during elections, and carrying out peaceful demonstrations on government agenda issues relevant to its constituency (23 Oct. 2016). Sources indicated that the SLM has also participated in elections (Senior Researcher 24 Oct. 2016; Research Professor

21 Oct. 2016; *Addis Fortune* 7 Apr. 2015). Further and corroborating information on specific incidents or activities of the SLM could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.1 Use of Violence and Involvement in Armed Conflict

The Research Professor stated that the SLM "allegedly has an armed wing" and that there are reports of training camps in Somalia (21 Oct. 2016). In contrast, the Senior Researcher indicated that the SLM was an armed group until 1991 and that, to her knowledge, the SLM has not been involved in organized violence since then (24 Oct. 2016). The Lecturer similarly stated that, to his knowledge, since 1996, the SLM has not engaged in violence (23 Oct. 2016).

Information on incidents of violence involving the SLM or its members between 2012 and 2016 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 Activities of the Medrek

Media sources have reported on the following events concerning the Medrek:

- In January 2015, the Medrek accused the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) of partiality after the NEBE appointed election observers for the May 2015 elections who, in the opinion of the Medrek, were affiliated with the ruling party (*Addis Fortune* 11 Jan. 2015; *The Reporter* qtd. in BBC 7 Jan. 2015).
- On 13 March 2015, the Medrek published its election manifesto for the May 2015 elections which focuses on "politics, security, foreign relations and national interest, and economic and social development" (*The Reporter* 16 Mar. 2015). The manifesto includes a proposal to introduce "an alternative working language based on the number of population," the creation of "a favorable environment for local private investors" for electricity generation projects, and a commitment to work on "arriv[ing] at national consensus" (ibid.).
- In June 2015, the Medrek called for the establishment of an "independent body of inquiry to inspect possible infringements of the constitution and other electoral laws" that allegedly occurred before and during the May 2015 elections (*The Reporter* 2 June 2015).

Information on the use of violence or armed activity by the Medrek could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Treatment of SLM Members

The Research Professor provided the opinion that SLM members "were [and] are harassed and arrested regularly in Ethiopia, like members of virtually all other opposition movements and parties" (Research Professor 21 Oct. 2016). The Lecturer stated that leaders and members of the SLM "claim to be routinely discriminated, marginalized, treated inhumanely, mentally and physically tortured, and even killed" (Lecturer 23 Oct. 2016). According to the same source, there are "some" cases of SLM members who have been forced to leave Ethiopia because they feared "persecution" (ibid.). The Lecturer also noted that harassment of SLM members took place during the elections of 2005, 2010, and 2015 (ibid.). The Senior Researcher indicated that the SLM "complained [about] a lack of an even playing field, intimidation, harassment, and imprisonment of supporters, members and candidates" during elections (24 Oct. 2016). An article by *Addis Fortune*, an Addis Ababa-based newspaper, reports that the SLM announced the withdrawal of its candidates from the April 2013 elections claiming "repression from the EPRDF[,] ... including the death of one if its members in Dale Wereda in the Southern Region" (22 Apr. 2013).

In its submission to the 2014 UN Universal Periodic Review for Ethiopia, Amnesty International (AI) states that

[i]n 2012, a large number of ethnic Sidama were arrested in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples [SNNPR] region, including around the celebration of Fichee, the Sidama New Year. The arrests were reportedly in response to calls for a separate regional statehood for the Sidama. Many of those arrested were detained only briefly, while some of the community leaders were charged with crimes against the state. (AI Oct. 2013, 4)

Further and corroborating information on incidents of conflict between SLM leaders, members, or supporters, and authorities, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4.1 Treatment of the Medrek

Information on treatment of SLM members in the context of the Medrek could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The US Department of State's *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015* indicates that opposition parties reported the death of six party members in the SNNPR, Oromia, Amhara, and Tigray, including four members of the Medrek (US 13 Apr. 2016, 2). Similarly, on 18 July 2016, *The Reporter* indicated that the Medrek announced that one of its members was murdered in the Kafa zone of the SNNPR, "increasing the number of murdered party members to five" (*The Reporter* 18 July 2016). The same source cites Endesahw, Medrek's head of public relations, as stating that "[t]he killings and mass detention on the members of the party is mounting in different corners of the country in an alarming rate" (ibid.). Further information on the treatment of the Medrek members 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.

Notes

[1] The website of the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) indicates that the Sidama people live in the south-central part of Ethiopia (SLM n.d.a). The Joshua Project, a Christian research initiative on ethnic groups throughout the world (Joshua Project n.d.a), states that the Sidama are an ethnic group that live in "a cone-shaped area of the middle of southern Ethiopia" (ibid. n.d.b). Common River, a "US-based non-governmental organization ... implementing a community development program in the heart of the Sidama coffee-growing region" (Common River n.d.a) notes that the Sidama are located in the Sidama Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR) in southern Ethiopia (ibid. n.d.b). According to the SLM website, the capital city of Sidama is Hawassa (SLM n.d.a). The same source cites the Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency as indicating that there were 3.8 million Sidama people in 2012 (ibid.). The website of the Joshua Project indicates that its population is 4.2 million (Joshua Project n.d.b).

[2] Sources indicate that in the May 2015 elections, the ruling EPRDF party won all seats in parliament (Human Rights Watch 23 June 2015; US 13 Apr. 2016, 1), a total 547 seats (ibid.).

[3] The Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) is a "development research institute" based in Norway (CMI n.d.).

[4] *Europa World Online* indicates that the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), "known popularly as the Dergue [Derg] (Committee)," was the military regime that came to power in Ethiopia after deposing Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 (n.d.).

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Ethiopian Advocacy Network; Human Rights Watch; Professor of international development, Roskilde University; Professor of political science, California State University; Rift Valley Institute.

Internet sites, including: *Africa Confidential*; *Africa Research Bulletin*; AllAfrica; Bertelsmann Stiftung; *Capital*; ecoi.net; Ethiopian Satellite Television Service; *Europe World Plus*; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; Freedom House; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Institute for Security Studies; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Crisis Group; Minority Rights Group; Radio France internationale; Stanford University – Mapping Militant Organizations; Transparency International; UN – Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Refworld, ReliefWeb; Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization; US – Central Intelligence Agency; University of Maryland – Global Terrorism Database, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.

Attachments

1. Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM). N.d. "[Mission, Vision and Goals](#)." [Accessed 24 Oct. 2016]
2. Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM). N.d. "[SLM Political Program](#)." [Accessed 14 Oct. 2016]

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[Top of Page](#)

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