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.

ETH105303.E

Ethiopia: Situation of the Shekha ethnic group, including the relation to the Ogaden ethnic group, the Ethiopian and Somali Regional Administration, and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (2013-2015)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information on the Shekha ethnic group was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. However, the following information about the Sheka Zone and the Shekacho and Sheko ethnic groups may be useful.

1. Sheka Zone

According to the government of Ethiopia, the country is divided into Administrative Regions, also known as Zones, which include the Sheka Zone (Ethiopia n.d.a). According to the Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA), an Ethiopian membership-based association with the aim of working for a "healthy ecosystem, vibrant culture and improved lives of communities in Ethiopia" (MELCA n.d.b), the Sheka Zone is in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNP) (ibid. n.d.a). The SNNP's website indicates that it is located in the southwest part of the country (Ethiopia n.d.a, 1). The SNNP's Regional State Health Bureau indicates that the region is Ethiopia's third largest administrative region and that it is the "most diverse region in the country in terms of language, culture, and ethnic background" (ibid. n.d.b). According to Ethiopia's 2007 census, the population of SNNP was approximately 14.9 million (ibid. 2007, 82). According to the SNNP Regional State Health Bureau, the region accounts for approximately 20 percent of the country's population (ibid. n.d.b). UNESCO reports that the Sheka Zone's largest ethnic group is the Shekacho [Shekecho], representing 34.7 percent of the zone's population, and that another ethnic group in the region is the Sheko ethnic group, which represents 5 percent of the region's population (UN Sept. 2012).

According to Ethiopia's 2007 census, of the country's total population, 77,561 people identified as Shekacho and 37,576 as Sheko (Ethiopia 2007, 73). The same source indicates that the majority of Shekacho (68,768 individuals) and Sheko (34,445 individuals) live in rural areas (ibid.). Within the SNNP Region, there were 65,463 Shekacho (7,704 urban and 57,759 rural) and 36,527 Sheko (2,937 urban and 33,590 rural) (ibid., 83). The same source indicates that 21 people speak Shekacho in the Somali Region (ibid., 98) and 67,573 people speak Shekacho in the SNNP Region (ibid., 101).

2. Ogaden Basin and the ONLF

Information about the relationship between the Shekacho and Sheko ethnic groups and the Ogaden basin region, the Somali region or the ONLF could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. However, the following information may be useful.

The Inter Press Service (IPS) indicates that the Ogaden basin is located in south-eastern Ethiopia, in the Somali National Regional State (SNRS), and that it has a population of 8 to 10 million ethnic Somali (IPS 23
The Rift Valley Institute (RVI), an independent non-profit organization working in seven African countries to "advance useful knowledge of the region and its diverse communities" (RVI n.d.), indicates that the Ogaden region refers to the entire ethnic Somali-inhabited part of Ethiopia (ibid. 2014, 12). According to the 2007 census, the population of the Somali region was 4,445,219; of which 4,320,478 people identified as ethnic Somali, 26 as Shekacho and 10 as Sheko (Ethiopia 2007, 80). There are no ethnic groups referred to as "Ogaden" in the 2007 census (ibid., 73-74).

The US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 indicates that the ONLF is an "ethnically based, violent and fragmented separatist group operating in [Ethiopia's] Somali region" (US 25 June 2015, 2). Human Rights Watch reports that the Ethiopian government considers the ONLF to be a terrorist organization (Human Rights Watch 25 Mar. 2014). Sources report that the ONLF has been fighting for self-governance (ibid.; IPS 23 Feb. 2014; CFR 1 Nov. 2007) of ethnic Somalis living in the Ogaden region (ibid.; IPS 23 Feb. 2014). Human Rights Watch reports that the ONLF "was initially a political party, but began a low-level armed insurgency in Ethiopia's Somali region in response to what it perceived to be the EPRDF's [Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, the ruling party] failure to respect regional autonomy" (Human Rights Watch 25 Mar. 2014). The same source indicates that the ONLF won control over the Somali region in 1992, but the group's open advocacy of secession for the Somali region "led to its ouster from government in 1994" (ibid. 3 July 2007).

Sources report that the conflict between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF has been ongoing for 20 years (RVI 2014; IPS 23 Feb. 2014). Country Reports 2014 indicates that in 2014, "scattered fighting continued between government forces — primarily regional government-backed militias — and elements of the ONLF" and that the ONLF was responsible for "abuses" in 2014 (US 25 June 2015, 2). The IPS indicates that "reports of forced evictions and human rights abuses in the vicinity of oil and gas fields [in the Ogaden region] is creating a new wave of grievances against the government in local communities" (IPS 23 Feb. 2014). Without providing details, the same source reports that the Ethiopian government placed an embargo on the Ogaden basin, which has "severely" isolated the region's population from "Ethiopia's development gains" and interfered with humanitarian agencies' access to the region (ibid.).

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


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