

Ethiopia

| | |
|--|--|
| Response to Information Request Number: | ETH00005.ZSF |
| Date: | 10 January 2000 |
| Subject: | Ethiopia: Information on Civil Administrators that served under the Mengistu regime |
| From: | INS Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C. |
| Keywords: | Ethiopia / Arbitrary arrest / Arbitrary detention / Armed conflicts / Armed resistance movements / Basic needs / Civil and political rights / Civil servants / Derg / Dergue / Displaced persons / Forced migration / Freedom of movement / Fundamental rights and freedoms / Humanitarian assistance / Guerrilla warfare / Political movements / Political parties / Political representation / Popular movements / Public service / Right to a fair trial / Right to an adequate standard of living / Right to assistance / Right to resist oppression / Right to the security of the person / Social policy / War victims |

Query:

What were the duties of Civil Administrators (Chief Civil Administrators, Regional Civil Administrators) under the Mengistu regime?

Could someone in that position have been involved in or have assisted in the persecution of civilians, particularly with reference to Tigray Province from 1985-87, Gojjam from 1987-89, and Gondar from 1989-91?

Response:

Among the sources contacted, the RIC was unable to locate information that directly links the civil administrator of Tigray, Gojjam, and Gondar during the periods in question to specific acts of persecution. However, the RIC provides the following information on human rights violations that were committed by government actors during the regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam.

War, famine and indiscriminate violence against civilians by the Ethiopian army and air force characterized the period following the 1974 revolution, which brought Major Mengistu Haile Mariam to power in Ethiopia. It is estimated that more than 150,000 were killed during the war, not including those deaths attributed to famine. Gross human rights violations occurred consistently throughout the years that Mengistu ruled Ethiopia. Some years were worse than others and civilians in some locations suffered more intense persecution than others. In the mid 1980's the government used counter-insurgency tactics which included: 1) forcible relocation and control of the rural population, 2) systematic restriction of food supplies in insurgent areas, 3) the use of indiscriminate violence and terror against civilians; and 4) the fostering of divisions within insurgent movements (Africa Watch, Sept. 1991, 3-4).

Tigray province (also known as Tigre) in northern Ethiopia was the stronghold of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a guerrilla movement which fought for the ouster of the Mengistu regime. In an effort to defeat the TPLF the government placed

restrictions on the movement of Tigrayan residents, engaged in forced resettlement after late 1984, and employed the widespread use of terror against civilians (Africa Watch, Sept. 1991, 4). *Evil Days*, a lengthy account published by Africa Watch that details the years leading up to the 1991 overthrow of the Mengistu regime, describes the war in the north as having been fought between the army and large sections of the people, rather than fought between the army and the rebel fronts. Although *Evil Days* does not deal directly with the civil institutions apart from those used to carry out the "Red Terror" in Addis Ababa during 1977-78, it provides a great deal of insight into the government tactics used in Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia (Africa Watch, Sept. 1991, 3-7).

From 1980 onwards, the TPLF controlled an estimated 85% of Tigray province through their classic employment of guerrilla strategy. On the other hand, the government army was able to launch offensives into most parts of the province as well (Africa Watch, Sept. 1991, 139). There were ten major government offensives in Tigray during the war, the last three occurred from 1985 onwards (Africa Watch, Sept. 1991, 9 & 197). A particularly insidious aspect of the government's strategy was the use of international food aid for counter-insurgency purposes. In Tigray, the government starved the civilian population, to punish residents for their support of the TPLF, by withholding food aid from the province (Africa Watch, Sept. 1991, 12-14). According to a variety of reports, donor countries in 1990 pressed Mengistu "to refrain from starvation tactics" that had cost so many lives in the past (Lewis, 22 Apr. 1990; Manegold and Wilkinson, 14 May 1990). Dawit Wolde Giorgis, formerly a senior member of Mengistu's government who grew disaffected and then helped expose the Ethiopian famine of the mid-1980s, accuses Mengistu of blocking aid with the intent of starving to death rebel populations (Giorgis, 12 July 1987). As it was, between October 1983 and October 1985 famine killed possibly a million people. Relief was desperately needed in Tigray Province in 1985 and 1987 (Awori, 2 Feb. 1985; Shields, 17 Dec. 1987). Not so coincidentally, the Mengistu regime sought to deliver rebels in Tigray a knockout blow in late 1985 (Ottaway, 1985); and fighting there was also intense in 1987.

The army offensive that was launched in Tigray in 1985 was in part aimed to prevent clandestine relief supplies from coming over the Sudanese border to TPLF-held areas. Relief convoys, feeding centers and refugees were targeted in air attacks. The government's response to the famine and a strategy used to weaken support for the TPLF was a program of forced resettlement. The resettlement program was estimated to have killed at least 50,000 and was characterized by violence and coercion. The program involved numerous abuses of human rights, including the violent and arbitrary manner in which resettlers were taken, combined with appalling conditions in transit and upon arrival (Africa Watch, Sept. 1991, 14).

Similarly, from 1989-1991 rebels gradually took control of Gondar Province, with fierce fighting in 1989 that affected relief. And, according to at least one report in 1989, civilians in the town of Gondar feared government reprisals for rebel victories (Bond, 25 Feb. 1989). By late 1989 rebels captured much of Gondar, including a significant military base at Debra Tabor (Perlez, 28 Dec. 1989). Throughout the 1989-91 period fighting and aid were very closely linked. Gojjam does not show up in news accounts for the period 1987-89.

A social anthropologist with many years of field experience in Tigray in the 1980s stated that "the position of Chief Civil Administrator carried with it, in essence, the 'power of life and death' over all those civilians living under that person's jurisdiction. Search and seizure, arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and death were within the realm of responsibility of the Civil Administrator. Indeed, such positions were rarely obtained by any individuals other than regime loyalists, who would be required, as a demonstration of loyalty, to reserve the harshest treatment for any individuals suspected of TPLF involvement or sympathy." Another factor which might have influenced how much power a particular civil administrator wielded is whether or not the individual maintained another position simultaneously in the Worker's Party of Ethiopia (WPE). A person who held both a high ranking civilian position and a position within the WPE might have held an even greater degree of authority and greater degree of interest in carrying out the government's programs to subdue the TPLF. Cadres of the WPE would have closely monitored an

Administrator who did not hold a position within the WPE along with a civilian position (Hendrie, 29 Nov. 1999 & 8 January 2000).

A search of NEXIS, FBIS, and a variety of other online databases turned up only one reference to the position of Civil Administrator under the Mengistu regime. In 1997 the Ethiopian authorities arrested a former Civil Administrator for his political activities under Mengistu (*ION*, 1 Feb. 1997). Ex-dictator Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam fled to Zimbabwe in 1991. When he recently visited South Africa, the Ethiopian government requested his extradition, however, Mengistu returned to Zimbabwe before extradition proceedings could begin (*Addis Tribune*, 24 Dec. 1999). Ethiopia wants Mengistu, and more than a thousand of his still-at-large indicted subordinates, for trials in connection with his repressive rule. Mengistu, by some accounts, ordered killed as many as 100,000 of his countrymen (Lorch, 11 Nov. 1994). The Government's Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) continues to conduct trials of those accused of committing crimes while serving under the Mengistu regime. Charges have been brought against 5,198 persons. Many of the accused were detained for more than 6 years without formal charge. Currently all have been indicted and arraigned. Testimony of victims continues to be heard in open court. More than half of the accused are not in custody and were charged in absentia (*Country Reports 1998, 1999*, 148).

In November 1999 Amnesty International (AI) expressed dismay over a death sentence in absentia handed down to Getachew Terba, a former district governor and army lieutenant. He was convicted for ordering the detention, torture and execution of five alleged government opponents during the Red Terror campaign of 1977-78. He was

the first person to be condemned to death among the more than 5,000 people charged with genocide and crimes against humanity during the Mengistu regime (AI, 15 Nov. 1999). On December 27, 1999, the Second Criminal Division of the Federal High Court found a "Red Terror" defendant guilty of recommending the execution of five individuals. Sentencing is scheduled for Monday January 3, 2000. This is the fifth guilty verdict rendered in the trial of ex-officials of the Mengistu regime (*The Reporter*, 27 Dec, 1999).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

Addis Tribune. "US Admits Helping Menghistu to Escape," (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, *Addis Tribune*, 24 December 1999). [Internet: Accessed on 27 December 1999] www.africanews.org.

Amnesty International (AI). 12 November 1999. "Ethiopia: First death sentence in Dergue trials." [Internet: Accessed on 29 December 1999] www.amnesty.org.

Awori, Horace. "Ethiopia: Tigray Situation Worse than Previously Believed," (Inter Press Service, 2 February 1985) — as reported in NEXIS.

Bond, Catherine. "Rebels gaining ground in Ethiopia offensive," (London: *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 February 1989), P. 10 — as reported in NEXIS.

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998. 1999. United States Department of State. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Giorgis, Dawit Wolde. "Celebrating while a million Ethiopians starved," (Manchester, UK: *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 12 July 1987), P. 8 — as reported in NEXIS.

Hendrie, Ph.D, Barbara. Social Anthropologist and former employee of the Emergency Relief Desk, a consortium of voluntary agencies consigning food to the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and Relief Society of Tigray (REST). 29 November 1999. E-mail sent to INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC. 8 January 2000. Telephonic interview.

Indian Ocean Newsletter (ION). "Omar Ali Kheire (Ethiopia)," (Paris: Indigo Publications, 1 February 1997), No. 751 — as reported in NEXIS.

Lewis, Paul. "U.N. Says Ethiopia Thwarts Delivery of Food Aid," (New York: *The New York Times*, 22 April 1990), Sec. 1, Part 1, P. 19 — as reported in NEXIS.

Lorch, Donatella. "Addis Ababa Journal; Where Tyrants Ruled, Cry for Justice," (New York: *The New York Times*, 11 November 1994), P.A4. — as reported in NEXIS.

Manegold, C.S., and Wilkinson, Ray. "At the Brink of Starvation," (*Newsweek*, 14 May 1990), P. 33 — as reported in NEXIS.

Ottaway, David. "Soviets Back Allies Against Insurgencies; Offensives Follow Gorbachev's Ascent," (Washington, D.C.: *The Washington Post*, 25 October 1985), P. A31 — as reported in NEXIS.

Perlez, Jane. "Ethiopia Base and 2 Towns Said to Fall to Rebels," (New York: *The New York Times*, 28 December 1989), P. A8 — as reported in NEXIS.

The Reporter. "Court finds Col. Zeleke guilty," (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: *The Reporter*, 27 December 1999). [Internet: Accessed on 27 December 1999] www.africanews.org.

Shields, Todd. "Rebels Strain Ethiopian Lifeline," (London: *The Financial Times*, 17 December 1987), P. 4 — as reported in NEXIS.

Last Modified 06/14/2002