

Ethiopia

Response to Information Request Number:	ETH00002.ZLA
Date:	10 November 1999
Subject:	Treatment of Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) associates in Ethiopia and Eritrea
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.
Keywords:	Eritrea / Ethiopia / Conscription / Deportation / Draft / Expulsion / Forced removals / National defense / Political movements / Political opposition / Political parties / Political persecution / Political situation / Refugee protection / Resettlement / Territorial integrity

Query:

Is the Eritrean Liberation Front active in Ethiopia, and would the Ethiopians encourage people to support it by refraining from deporting those Eritreans who join it? Would an Eritrean deported from Ethiopia to Eritrea in June 1998, whose spouse is an ELF member, have cause to fear a return to Eritrea today?

Response:

The Eritrean Liberation Front is a failed successor of the original expatriate Eritrean organization, called the Eritrean Liberation Movement. Founded in 1959, the ELM was dominated by Christians. In 1961 the ELF, dominated by Beni Amer Muslims from the western Eritrean lowlands, superseded the ELM. A majority faction of the ELF, however, split off in 1972. This Eritrean People's Liberation Front was more leftist (quasi-Marxist) than the ELF and led by Christians and secularists (Henze, Spring 1986). Since 1972 the ELF and EPLF have clashed repeatedly (Prunier, April 1996). In 1991 the EPLF led Eritrea to de facto independence from Ethiopia and in 1993 gained Eritrea international recognition. Renamed the People's Front for Democracy and Justice it remains Eritrea's ruling party, indeed, the only party recognized by the government

(CIA 1999). Various reports suggest that the EPLF/PFDJ tends to persecute opposition movements (Immigration and Refugee Board 6 Mar. 1996).

Ethiopia, in the course of its war with Eritrea over the past two years, has tried to exploit divisions within the Eritrean community by supporting several of the diverse and unruly ELF factions, along with other Eritrean dissidents (BBC 2 March 1999; ION 7 Nov. 1998; ION 27 Mar. 1999). Despite evidence that Ethiopia had detained former ELF members as part of an expulsion campaign against Eritreans (AFP 11 July 1998; BBC 23 June 1998; ION 25 Apr. 1998), ELF broadcasts, courtesy of Ethiopia's open support, called for peaceful negotiations to resolve the conflict as well as for war crimes indictments of the EPLF regime (FBIS 19 June 1998 & 3 Aug. 1999). According to Agence France Presse, however, the "overwhelming majority" of Eritreans support the EPLF government (AFP 4 Mar. 1999). While this is likely the case for Eritreans within Eritrea, it must also be noted that a sizable number of Eritreans remain refugees outside the country, in particular about 320,000 estimated to be in neighboring Sudan, many of whom have been there for years (USCR 1999). Some of those may have chosen to remain as refugees for political reasons.

Beginning in June 1998 Ethiopia began deporting resident Eritreans to Eritrea. Perhaps as many as 60,000 have been deported since then, out of a population variously estimated at between 130-550,000. Many deportees had lived in Ethiopia all their lives. Some had served in high positions in the Ethiopian government (BBC 21 July 1999). Deportation was often accompanied by theft, physical abuse, and incarceration. Proceedings seemed arbitrary and capricious. Frequently, families were separated. According to surveys undertaken by an independent academic, approximately 45% of spouses were separated during deportation, the husband usually taken away first (Legesse 22 Feb. 1999). In May of this year Amnesty International expressed concerns that these expulsions threatened the entire Eritrean community in Ethiopia (AI 21 May 1999)—while such fears may have been premature, further warning signs are indeed in the air. In August the Ethiopian government ordered all Eritreans living in Ethiopia who are 18 or over to register, in person, with the authorities (BBC 15 Aug. 1999). Those who fail to register will be treated as illegal aliens and, presumably, deported.

While Eritrean deportees have generally enjoyed a warm welcome upon their arrival in Eritrea (BBC 23 June 1998), some men and women may find themselves eligible for the draft. Eritrean law requires every citizen between 18 and 40 to perform national service. Earlier this year police rounded up hundreds for allegedly trying to escape their obligation (BBC 20 Apr. 1999). Now that the rainy season has ended, analysts expect the war to heat up again (Vick 3 Nov. 1999), with a concomitant renewed need for recruits. Furthermore, if the war does in fact resume, there is a high probability that Ethiopia will continue and/or accelerate its Eritrean deportation program.

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:

Agence France Presse (AFP). "Ethiopia – Over 1,000 Eritreans Held for Security Reasons," (Paris: 11 July 1998) — as reported on FBIS web site.

Agence France Presse (AFP). "Skirmishes reported as Horn border war looks set to go on," (Paris, 4 March 1999) — as reported in NEXIS.

Amnesty International (AI). "Ethiopia and Eritrea. Human Rights Issues in a Year of Conflict," (London: 21 May 1999) [Internet]
<http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1999/AFR/16400099.htm>.

BBC. "World: Africa: Tensions rise over Eritreans deported by Ethiopia," (London: 21 June 1998) [Internet] <http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid%5F116000/116569.stm>.

BBC. "Eritrea accuses Ethiopia of holding detainees in "containers""', (Asmara: Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea, 23 June 1998) — as reported in NEXIS.

BBC. "World: Africa Analysis: The war's bitter legacy," (London: 2 March 1999) [Internet]
<http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid%5F289000/289111.stm>.

BBC. "World: Africa: Eritrea 'rounds up draft-dodgers'", (London: 20 April 1999) [Internet]
<http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid%5F323000/323436.stm>.

BBC. "World: Africa: Eritrean Ethiopians lose their homeland," (London: 21 July 1999) [Internet] <http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid%5F396000/396203.stm>.

BBC. "World: Africa: Ethiopia orders Eritrean registration," (London: 15 August 1999) [Internet] <http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid%5F421000/421147.stm>.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). "The World Factbook," (Washington: 1999) [Internet] <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>.

Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). "Eritrean Opposition Says War 'Unnecessary'," (Tigray Radio, 19 June 1998) — as reported on FBIS web site.

Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). "Eritrean Rebels Charge Government of War Crimes," (Addis Ababa Office of the Government Spokesperson, 3 August 1999) — as reported on FBIS web site.

Henze, Paul B. "Eritrea: The Endless War," (Washington: *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1986), Vol. 9, No. 2, P. 23 — as reported in NEXIS.

Immigration and Refugee Board, Documentation, Information and Research Branch. "Eritrea: Information on the treatment by the government of Eritrea of political opposition, specifically members of the Eritrean Liberation Front – Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC)," (Ottawa: 6 March 1996), 15p. [Internet].

Indian Ocean Newsletter (ION). "Eritreans detained," (25 April 1998), No. 809 — as reported in NEXIS.

Indian Ocean Newsletter (ION). "Ethiopia: Looking for new pals," (7 November 1998), No. 832 — as reported in NEXIS.

Indian Ocean Newsletter (ION). "Opposition viewpoint," (27 March, 1999), No. 851 — as reported in NEXIS.

Legesse, Asmarom. "A Scientific Survey of Ethnic Eritrean Deportees from Ethiopia," (Asmara: 22 February 1999) [Internet] <http://www.primenet.com/~ephrem2/legesse/uprooted2.html>.

Prunier, Gerard. "Sudan – Eritrea: Early Warning Note," (UK: *Writenet*, April 1996) — as referenced in Refworld [Internet] <http://www.unhcr.ch/refworld/country/writenet/wrieri.htm>.

U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR). "Country Report: Sudan," (Washington: 1999) [Internet] <http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/africa/sudan.htm>.

Vick, Karl. "The Rain Has Stopped, So Blood May Flow Again in the Horn of Africa," (Washington: *Washington Post*, 3 November 1999), P. A31 [Internet]

Last Modified 06/14/2002