

Ethiopia

Response to Information Request Number:	ETH01008.ZAR
Date:	May 30, 2001
Subject:	Ethiopia: Information on the Treatment of Persons of Eritrean Origin in Ethiopia Since the Signing of the Algiers Peace Accord in December 2000
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Ethiopia / Eritrea / Citizenship / Deportation / Expulsion / Forced removal / Freedom of movement / Immigration policy / Minorities / National security / Nationality / Passports / Referendums / Right to access one's family / Right to leave and return to one's country / Right to a Passport / Travel documents

Query:

- 1) Are Ethiopians of Eritrean origin still being harassed, deported or expelled from Ethiopia?
- 2) Have any Ethiopians of Eritrean origin who were expelled begun to return to Ethiopia?
- 3) Can reports in an Ethiopian newspaper (Amarach) that 200 Eritreans were taken from their homes in Addis Ababa in January 2001 with their whereabouts "still unknown" be corroborated?

Response:

- 1) ARE ETHIOPIANS OF ERITREAN ORIGIN STILL BEING HARASSED, DEPORTED OR EXPELLED FROM ETHIOPIA?

During the two years of armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea from May 1998 to June 2000, some 75,000 people of Eritrean origin were expelled from Ethiopia on the of their Eritrean origin or descent and their presumed loyalty to Eritrea. In mid-June 2000 the parties agreed to a cease-fire. And on 12 December 2000, the two nations signed a peace agreement in Algiers. The provisions of the December 2000 agreement included commitments that the parties should "without delay, release and repatriate all prisoners of war"; "release and repatriate or return to their last place of residence all other persons detained as a result of the armed conflict"; and "afford humane treatment to each other's nationals and persons of each other's national origin within their respective territories" (BBC News Online 11 Dec. 2000).

In April 2001 the United Nations head of peacekeeping operations reported to the Security Council that there had been a formal separation of the two nations' armed forces, "no significant violations of the ceasefire" had occurred, and a 4,360-person UN peacekeeping force had been deployed (M2 Presswire 20 Apr. 2001). By early March 2001 more than 7,000 civilians of Ethiopian origin and more than 900 civilians of Eritrean origin had been repatriated with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and 1,835 Eritrean prisoners of war had been returned home under the auspices of ICRC (PANA 8 Mar. 2001; Embassy of Eritrea 6 Mar. 2001).

Information on the continued expulsion or systematic harassment of people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia since the signing of the December 2000 peace agreement was not found among the sources consulted by the RIC. According to a senior researcher of Human Rights Watch (HRW) there have not been new waves of expulsions since the signing of the peace accords, though the situation of people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia remains "vulnerable" (HRW 29 May 2001). However, isolated incidents of mistreatment of individuals of Eritrean origin in Eritrea have been reported. Eritrean authorities accused Ethiopia of detaining an Eritrean diplomat in Addis Ababa, at gunpoint in April 2001. Ethiopia denied the charge and made counter-accusations of intimidation and harassment by Eritrean security against an Ethiopian diplomat in Asmara (Bhalla 10 Apr. 2001). In January 2001 Eritrean authorities claimed that Ethiopian troops had killed an Eritrean youth, tortured two others and stolen 33 goats in the western area of Eritrea occupied by Ethiopia (Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea 23 Jan. 2001). On 21 May 2001 an Ethiopian newspaper reported the arrest of an Eritrean in the east of Ethiopia whom it was claimed was spying and recruiting youths for the Oromo Liberation Front (The Reporter 21 May 2001).

While there has been a noticeable diminution in harassment and other ill treatment of people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia since the end of the armed conflict, the situation of those of Eritrean origin living in Ethiopia appears to still be tenuous and precarious. They have witnessed 75,000 people in a similar situation to their own being detained, separated from family members, and expelled from Ethiopia in the past three years under very difficult conditions--without access to the courts or any appeal process--and with their property in many cases confiscated, taken over or sold to pay debts. They have had to register as aliens with the Security, Immigration, and Refugees Affairs Authority (SIRAA) every six months if they voted in the 1993 Eritrean referendum or took Eritrean citizenship. Many have had their passports confiscated and been denied exit visas to leave Ethiopia or been given a single exit visa with no right of return to Ethiopia (U.S. DOS Feb. 2001). According to the Human Rights Watch senior researcher, the peace process has not fundamentally changed the situation of people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia, who remain vulnerable: the registration process continues and fears that the information provided will lead to another round of harassment and expulsion is a daily reality (HRW 29 May 2001).

Divisions within the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)—the dominant force in the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)—have increased tensions within Ethiopia. In March 2001, 12 of the 30 members of the TPLF Central Committee, including the party's second in command, walked out or were suspended and were reportedly fired from their positions. Officials close to the prime minister admitted that there was widespread internal dissent within the party. The TPLF dissidents opposed the economic policies of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and accused Meles of being "too soft" on Eritrea—arguing that Ethiopia should have capitalized politically upon its military advances and that the peace agreement failed to reflect Ethiopia's advantage in the war (BBC News Online 21 Mar. 2001; Addis Tribune 4 May 2001; Addis Tribune 27 Apr. 2001). According to the researcher from Human Rights Watch, the group that was forced out of the TPLF had also pushed for continued expulsions of those of Eritrean origin and criticized Meles for not being sufficiently tough on Eritreans within Ethiopia (HRW 29 May 2001). In May 2001, the head of intelligence and security, a key ally of Meles, was assassinated as he entered an armed forces officers' club in Addis Ababa. And in April 2001, thousands of demonstrators clashed with police in protest against police brutality and in support of political and academic freedom (BBC News 23 May 2001).

While implementation of the peace agreement has advanced, there is still significant animosity between the two nations and their leaders, and the tense political situation in Ethiopia holds out the possibility that Eritreans could once again be harassed or deported if the political situation deteriorated or it appeared in the political interests of the Ethiopian leadership to target them. Though it is only a contingency plan, it is worth noting that the joint needs assessment of the Eritrean government and the United Nations states, "provisions should be made to handle some 45,000 additional deportees in 2001" (Government of Eritrea/United Nations Jan. 2001).

2) HAVE ANY ETHIOPIANS OF ERITREAN ORIGIN WHO WERE EXPELLED BEGUN TO RETURN TO ETHIOPIA?

No information has been found to suggest that any of those expelled have returned to Ethiopia. Nor does it appear a likely option. The Information Officer at the Eritrean Embassy in Washington, D.C., was not aware of anyone having returned (Embassy of Eritrea 23 May 2001). The annual needs assessment for humanitarian assistance of the Eritrean government and the United Nations for 2001 dismisses the possibility that those expelled might return to Ethiopia. The report states, "The deportees cannot return to Ethiopia and will have to be given land and/or means to earn a living"... Since they are not willing or able to return to Ethiopia, all will have to be integrated into Eritrean society" (Government of Eritrea/United Nations Jan. 2001). It may also be noted that while the December 2000 peace agreement calls for the creation of a Claims Commission to decide on claims by one government or its nationals against the other for loss, damage, or injury and requires "humane treatment to each other's nationals and persons of each other's national origin within their respective territories," there are no provisions related to the return of those expelled from either country (BBC News Online 11 Dec. 2000).

3) CAN REPORTS IN AN ETHIOPIAN NEWSPAPER (AMARACH) THAT 200 ERITREANS WERE TAKEN FROM THEIR HOMES IN ADDIS ABABA IN JANUARY 2001 BE CORROBORATED?

Information to corroborate the report in Amarach of the arrest of 200 Eritreans in Addis Ababa was not found among the sources consulted by the RIC.

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.

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