



Ethiopia

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2006](#)

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Ethiopia is a federal republic under the leadership of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition. The country's population was approximately 77 million. In the May 2005 parliamentary elections, the EPRDF won a third consecutive five-year term. Domestic and international observers reported that polling throughout the country was generally credible, although irregularities and intimidation of voters and election observers marred polling in many areas. Political parties predominantly were ethnically based, but opposition parties engaged in a steady process of consolidation. While civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, there were instances in which elements within those forces acted independently of government authority.

Human rights abuses reported during the year included: limitation on citizens' right to change their government during the most recent elections; unlawful killings, and beating, abuse, and mistreatment of detainees and opposition supporters by security forces; poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly those suspected of sympathizing with or being members of the opposition; detention of thousands without charge and lengthy pretrial detention; infringement on citizens' privacy rights and frequent refusal to follow the law regarding search warrants; restrictions on freedom of the press; arrest, detention, and harassment of journalists for publishing articles critical of the government; restrictions on freedom of assembly; limitations on freedom of association; violence and societal discrimination against women and abuse of children; female genital mutilation (FGM); exploitation of children for economic and sexual purposes; trafficking in persons; societal discrimination against persons with disabilities and religious and ethnic minorities; and government interference in union activities.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of political killings; however, federal and local police forces committed unlawful killings during the year.

On January 23, federal police shot and killed 15 demonstrators and injured 19 others in the East Wallega zone, Guduru District. The shootings occurred during a demonstration by residents against local government forces. No investigation was conducted into the incident.

On February 6, off-duty federal police officer Alemu Dariba, along with other unidentified persons, killed four youths in Gondar. Dariba allegedly approached 17-year-old Berket Fantahu; 18-year-old Abebe Wondem-Agegn; 18-year-old Sentayhu Worknehand; and 19-year-old Dawit Tesfaye and ordered them to raise their hands. He then marched them to a stream 30 yards away, forced them to the ground, and shot each of them in the head. Dariba was arrested shortly after the incident and remained in custody without charge at year's end.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) reported that on May 27, in a violent conflict between local store owners in Nazret, Oromiya Region, police shot and killed Alemu Tesfaye, Tariku Yakiso, and Mensur Musema. Police had attempted to evict the store owners, and the owners and their employees responded by throwing rocks at the police. No investigation was conducted into the incident.

During the year reports were received of the August 2005 killing of Elias Molago, of Gibe District, by army troops. After Molago was killed, his body was publicly displayed in the town of Hosana, the district capital. Molago, an election observer in the 2000 parliamentary elections, had disputed the official results that gave the ruling party victory in the area. No investigation was conducted into Molago's killing.

There were no developments in the early 2005 political killings of opposition All-Ethiopia Unity Party/Coalition for Unity and Democracy (AEUP/CUD) party members Anley Adis, Eyilegne Wendimneh, Tilahun Kerebe, and Alamir Aemero. At the end of 2005 police had arrested two suspects in the killing of Tilahun Kerebe, but no further information was available.

There were no developments in the 2005 political killings by police, militia, and kebele (local administration) officials of 24 Oromo National Congress (ONC) members, including Ahmed Adem and parliamentarian-elect Tesfaye Adane. At year's end, three police officers suspected of involvement in Adane's killing were detained at Zway prison as their case remained under investigation.

There were no further developments in the 2005 political killing of CUD coordinator Hassan Endris in Amhara Region or the May killing of

Sheikh Osman Haji Abdella in Oromo Region. Both killings were committed by kebele officials.

There were no developments in the August 2005 political killing of Bezela Lombiso and the rape of his wife by army troops. Bezela had been accused of killing a policeman during the 2000 national and regional elections.

There were no developments in the September 2005 killing of CUD member Asefa Getahun, the October 2005 political killing of Girma Biru, or the extrajudicial killings of Mosse Wasse and Tila Tsega.

There were no significant developments in the following cases of persons killed by security forces in 2004: the killing of Kebede Uzo in the Somali region, the killing of ninth-grade student Alemu Tesfaye in Oromiya region; the killing of high school student Amelework Buli of Oromiya region; the killings of various AEUP supporters; the killing of 10 persons in Gode town; the killing of Geletaw Mamo of Amhara region and Efre Alemayehu of Addis Ababa.

There were no new developments reported in the following 2005 police killings of demonstrators: the June killings of 42 unarmed demonstrators in Addis Ababa; the November killings of 46 rioters; the killings of student Shibre Desalegn, 16-year-old student Nebiy Alemayehu, Zulufa Surur (a mother of seven children), or 16-year-old brothers Fekadu Negash and Abraham Yilma. Seven police officers were also killed during the November riots, and no individuals were charged in these cases.

In late October the commission of inquiry established by the government to investigate the alleged use of excessive force by security forces in violent 2005 antigovernment demonstrations released its report. The commission found that 193 civilians--nearly four times the number originally reported by the government--and 6 members of the security forces were killed, while 763 civilians and 71 members of the security forces were injured, many seriously.

The commission also found that security forces did not use excessive force, given demonstration violence; however, prior to the release of the report, the chairman and deputy chairman of the commission fled the country, allegedly in response to threats made against them by government forces. After fleeing, both stated publicly and showed video evidence that at an official meeting in June, the commission had originally decided, by a vote of eight to two, that excessive force was used and that the total number of killed and injured was the same as eventually reported. Following this vote, government officials allegedly urged commission members to change their votes to indicate that excessive force was not used.

At year's end the criminal trial of government soldiers who were charged with the killing, rape, and torture of hundreds of Anuaks during the December 2003 to May 2004 violence in the Gambella region remained ongoing. In 2004 an independent inquiry commission was established to investigate this case. As a result of the commission's findings, six members of the army were arrested and placed on trial for their involvement in the killings.

At year's end there were approximately two million landmines in the country, many dating from the 1998-2000 war with Eritrea. During the year landmines killed five and injured 20 civilians in districts bordering Eritrea. The government demining unit continued to make limited progress in its survey and demining of border areas. United Nations Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) officials reported that new landmines were planted on both sides of the border with Eritrea during the year. The government and UNMEE engaged in demining activities in selected areas along the border and disseminated information on the whereabouts of suspected mined areas to local residents.

Armed elements of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) continued to operate within the country. Clashes with government forces on numerous occasions resulted in the death of an unknown number of civilians, government security forces, and OLF and ONLF troops and members.

On April 15, a blast in the central market place in the town of Gedo, Oromiya region killed 15 persons and injured 37 others. The government accused dissident Oromo groups of involvement, but all denied responsibility. A number of individuals, including alleged ONC supporters, were arrested in connection with the bombing, although at year's end there were no reports of legal proceedings.

During the year several bomb explosions were reported in Addis Ababa and other parts of the country. On May 12, four persons were killed and 42 were injured in nine separate bombings in Addis Ababa. Security forces blamed the OLF and accused it of operating in cooperation with the Eritrean government; the OLF denied responsibility. There were no arrests in this case.

In late May, 42 persons were injured in three simultaneous bomb blasts at a hotel and two restaurants in Jijiga, Somali region.

Violent clashes between different ethnic clans during the year resulted in hundreds of deaths and injuries and displaced tens of thousands (see section 5).

On June 11, a group of armed men attacked a bus en route from Addis Ababa to Gambella, near the town of Bonga, Gambella region. At least 14 persons were killed and several others injured. Reports indicated that the assailants may have been ethnic Anuak dissidents. Several people were arrested in connection with this event and charged with murder. At year's end their case was ongoing.

On September 3, a hand grenade was thrown into the Wendimamchoch Hotel in the town of Jijiga, killing the owner and injuring seven others. The government had not identified suspects or made any arrests by year's end.

On September 15, an explosion in Addis Ababa killed three persons. The government reported that those killed were OLF members attempting to construct a bomb, using materials supplied by Eritrea. However, many believed that government security forces may have

been involved in the bombing.

A series of clashes between Muslims and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians during the year resulted in numerous deaths and injuries (see section 2.c.).

There were no further developments in the 2005 hand grenade attacks on four hotels and a residence in Jijiga, which resulted in five deaths and 31 injuries.

No further information was available on the trials of suspects arrested in connection with the 2004 hand grenade attack on a television room at Addis Ababa University.

There were no developments in the 2004 hand grenade attack on a Tigrayan-owned shop in Debre Zeit, Oromiya region. Police blamed the OLF for the attack.

The federal high court in Addis Ababa continued to arraign and prosecute those formally charged with committing genocide and other war crimes, including extrajudicial killings, under the 1975-91 Derg regime (see section 1.e.).

b. Disappearance

The politically motivated disappearances of tens of thousands of civilian protestors following the November 2005 political demonstrations persisted into the current reporting period. The independent commission of inquiry into the alleged use of force by security forces in June and November 2005 found that security officials held over 30,000 civilians incommunicado for up to three months in detention centers located in remote areas following the November 2005 demonstrations. Other estimates placed the number of such detainees at over 50,000. By year's end, all but a few hundred of these prisoners were released and those who remained in custody currently were facing trial.

In January EHRCO reported the December 2005 disappearances of six persons. On December 2, security forces abducted Lt. Abebe Alemu of Lafto Subcity, Addis Ababa; Heletework Zewdu of Akaki Subcity, Addis Ababa; and Wondimagegene Gedefaw of Kolfe Subcity, Addis Ababa. On December 21 and 22, security forces abducted Tadesse Zelelam, Ayana Chindessa, and Legesse Tolera at Nekemt High School in Nekemt, Oromiya region.

There were no developments in the June 2005 abduction by security forces of Addis Ababa residents Ashenafi Berhanu, Tsegaye Neguse, Daniel Worku, Adem Hussien, Jelalu Temam, Girum Seifu, Mekonnen Seifu, Endeshaw Terefe, Daniel Abera, Tesfaye Bacha, Tesfaye Jemena, Bonsa Beyene, Getu Begi, Solomon Bekele, Amanuel Asrat, Mesfin Mergia, or Dawit Demerew. The whereabouts of these individuals remained unknown.

There were no new developments in the May detention of Jigsa Soressa, a guard at the Mecha and Tulema Association (MTA), an Oromo Non-governmental organization (NGO), who reportedly continued to be detained at Addis Ababa prison.

In June 2005 three Ethiopian air force personnel landed a military helicopter at Ambouli, Djibouti; two of them reportedly requested asylum, but an Ethiopian military delegation reportedly convinced them to return to Ethiopia the next day. Amnesty International (AI) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) attempted to visit them in Djibouti but were refused. At year's end, family members told local press that the pilots were detained at an air force base and were restricted from seeing visitors.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the constitution and law prohibit the use of torture and mistreatment, there were numerous credible reports that security officials often beat or mistreated detainees. Opposition political parties reported frequent and systematic abuse of their supporters by police and regional militias.

On February 28, the opposition ONC reported that security forces beat and intimidated regional parliamentarian Wegayehu Dejene of Me-aa District, Oromiya region following a regional council meeting. At year's end no one had been charged.

The EHRCO reported that on July 30, security forces detained and beat one Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM) and five ONC regional parliamentarians after their attendance in a court case involving Mecha and Tulema Association members. At year's end no one had been charged.

The ONC reported that on January 23, several armed soldiers raped seven female residents of Guduru District, Oromiya region. The victims ranged in age from 18 to 37. At year's end there were no arrests.

There were no developments in the May 2005 of beating and subsequent suicide death of Abdeta Dita Entele, a member of the opposition coalition Oromo National Congress/United Ethiopian Democratic Forces of Siraro District in the Oromo region.

There were no developments in the October 2005 reported attack on Daniel Bekele, a policy advocate for the NGO ActionAid Ethiopia and a member of the executive committee of the Network of Ethiopian Non-governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations, which monitored the May 2005 elections. At year's end Bekele remained in police detention on trial for treason and genocide.

Authorities took no action against police responsible for the 2004 beatings of students, teachers, and parents at Oromiya region high schools and universities or against militia responsible for 2004 attacks on its members reported by the opposition All-Ethiopia Unity Party.

Security forces beat persons during demonstrations (see section 2.b.).

There were no developments in the 2005 report of two former senior government officials--former national and public security minister Tesfaye Woldeeselase and Leggesse Belayneh, former head of criminal investigations--who were given death sentences by the federal high court for torturing political opponents during the former Mengistu regime. At year's end, the death sentences had not been carried out.

During the year ethnic clashes resulted in hundreds of injuries and deaths (see section 5).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and pretrial detention center conditions remained very poor, and overcrowding continued to be a serious problem. Prisoners often were allocated fewer than 21.5 square feet of sleeping space each in a room that could contain up to 200 persons. The daily meal budget was approximately \$0.35 (3 birr) per prisoner, and many prisoners had family members deliver food daily or used personal funds to purchase food from local vendors. Prison conditions were unsanitary, and access to medical care was unreliable. There was no budget for prison maintenance.

In detention centers police often physically abused detainees. Authorities generally permitted visitors but sometimes denied them access to detainees. For example, the detained leaders of the CUD party had their visitation rights limited to immediate family members for a portion of the year.

While statistics were unavailable, there were some deaths in prison due to illness and poor health care. Prison officials were not forthcoming with reports of such deaths. The commission of inquiry into the 2005 post-election violence found at least 17 arrested protestors died in detention.

Authorities sometimes incarcerated juveniles with adults if they could not be accommodated at the juvenile remand home. There was only one juvenile remand home for children under age 15, with the capacity to hold 150 children.

Human rights organizations reported that in 2005 the government had transported 10,000 to 18,000 individuals (mostly youths ages 18 to 23 detained during the November 2005 mass house-to-house searches in Addis Ababa) to Dedessa, a military camp formerly used by the Derg regime located 375 kilometers west of the capital. During the year most of the prisoners were released, although a few hundred remained in custody, facing charges for alleged crimes related to the November 2005 searches.

In July a new 90 bed facility for women was inaugurated at Kaliti. The separate building on the compound was constructed by Justice for All - Prison Fellowship, with funding from foreign governments. The facility improved sanitary conditions, provided greater privacy to female inmates, and was expected to help reduce overcrowding. The construction of a new prison for men near Kaliti was underway at year's end.

During the year the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited regional prisons, civilian detention facilities, and police stations throughout the country and conducted hundreds of visits involving thousands of detainees. However, they were restricted from visiting federal prisons, including those where senior opposition, civil society, and media leaders were being held. The Prison Fellowship Ethiopia, a local NGO, was granted access to various prison and detention facilities, including federal prisons. The government also periodically granted diplomatic missions access to regional prisons and prison officials, subject to advanced notification. Authorities allowed the ICRC to meet regularly with prisoners without third parties being present. The ICRC received permission to visit military detention facilities where the government detained suspected OLF fighters. The ICRC also continued to visit civilian Eritrean nationals and local citizens of Eritrean origin detained on alleged national security grounds.

Government authorities continued to permit diplomats to visit prominent detainees held by the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) for alleged involvement in war crimes and terrorist activities. However, the government limited access of representatives of the international community access to leaders of the CUD opposition party, members of civil society groups, and journalists detained in November 2005 for alleged involvement in antigovernment demonstrations in Addis Ababa, who remained in federal police custody at Addis Ababa's Kaliti prison at year's end. The government also permitted Prison Fellowship Association and local religious leaders to visit these detainees.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Although the constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, the government frequently did not observe these provisions in practice.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Federal Police Commission reports to the Ministry of Federal Affairs, which in turn is subordinate to the parliament. Local government militias also operated as local security forces largely independent of the police and the military. Petty corruption remained a problem in the police force, particularly among traffic policemen who solicited bribes from motorists. Impunity also remained a serious problem. The government rarely publicly disclosed the results of investigations into such types of abuses. The federal police acknowledged that many members of its police force as well as regional police lacked professionalism.

The government continued its efforts to train police and army recruits in human rights. During the year the government continued to seek assistance from the ICRC, Prison Fellowship Association and the EHRCO to improve and professionalize its human rights training and curriculum to include more material on the constitution and international human rights treaties and conventions.

In November the commission investigating the alleged use of excessive force by security forces in violent antigovernment demonstrations of June and November 2005 delivered its report (see section 1.a.).

Arrest and Detention

Authorities regularly detained persons without warrants and denied access to counsel and family members, particularly in outlying regions. Although the law requires detainees to be informed of the charges against them within 48 hours, this generally was not respected in practice. While there was a functioning bail system, it was not available for some offenses, including murder, treason, and corruption. In most cases authorities set bail between \$115 and \$1,150 (1,000 to 10,000 birr), which was too costly for most citizens. In addition police officials did not always respect court orders to release suspects on bail. With court approval, persons suspected of serious offenses can be detained for 14 days while police conduct an investigation, and for additional 14 day periods while the investigation continues. The law prohibits detention in any facilities other than an official detention center; however, there were dozens of crude, unofficial local detention centers used by local government militia.

The government provided public defenders for detainees unable to afford private legal counsel, but only when their cases went to court. While in pretrial detention, authorities allowed such detainees little or no contact with legal counsel.

There were many reports from opposition party members that in small towns authorities detained persons in police stations for long periods without access to a judge, and that sometimes these persons' whereabouts were unknown for several months. Opposition parties registered many complaints during the year that government militias beat and detained their supporters without charge for participating in opposition political rallies (see section 1.c.).

The government continued its harassment of teachers, particularly in Oromiya region. The independent Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) reported that authorities detained numerous teachers and accused them of being OLF sympathizers, many of whom remained in prison at year's end. For example, in December prominent union members Tilahun Ayalew, Anteneh Getnet and Meqcha Mengistu were taken into police custody. Some of the teachers had been in detention for several years without charges. Human rights observers suspected several of the prolonged detentions were politically motivated.

Police continued to enter private residences and arrest individuals without warrants (see section 1.f.).

Police detained journalists during the year (see section 2.a.).

On May 27, following clashes between local police and store owners, 180 persons were detained by security forces in the town of Nazret, Oromiya region, and charged with inciting uprising and destruction of property (see section 1.a.). At year's end most of those arrested had charges dismissed and were released; however, there was no information available on those still detained.

On August 30, security forces rounded up 250 persons in the town of Tikur Inchini, Oromiya region, following an uprising by local ONC activists. At year's end 81 persons remained in prison facing charges of treason.

Authorities took no action against Amhara region government militia, district officials, and police who arbitrarily detained AEUP members in 2004. ONC member Olbana Lelisa, who was arbitrarily detained in 2004, was released in 2005.

Due to the fact that demonstrations were banned in November 2005, there were no reports that police detained persons for holding meetings and demonstrations. Opposition groups alleged that some of the persons detained by the SPO were held for political reasons, an allegation that the government denied (see section 1.e.).

In January international media reported that more than 11,000 persons detained in November 2005 following large-scale antigovernment demonstrations had been released. However, the commission of inquiry into post-election political violence found that over 30,000 individuals had been detained, while other reports placed the number at over 50,000. More than 2,200 of the prisoners were released without charge. An additional 734 persons detained during violence in Addis Ababa were released on January 6. More than 650 prisoners related to the protests were still being held at the Ziway detention camp in January, and the exact number of persons who remained in custody at year's end was not known.

In early February AI alleged that the government was still holding thousands of students under arrest in Oromiya region. The government denied the accusation, and claimed that only 86 students were under arrest for offenses including violence, property destruction, and "disrupting the teaching and learning process."

Alemayu Fantu, a prominent retailer, was arrested in October for allegedly being in possession of CUD civil disobedience calendars. He was released on bail after several weeks.

At year's end scores of CUD leaders, several members of NGOs active in civic education, and independent journalists detained in November 2005 remained in detention (see section 1.e.).

All of the OFDM members detained following the May 2005 parliamentary elections had been released by the end of the year.

In response to attacks by armed opposition groups operating out of Somalia and Kenya, the military continued to conduct operations, which included occasional arbitrary detentions, in the Southern, Somali, and Oromiya regions.

Authorities took no action against Amhara region government militia, district officials, and police who arbitrarily detained AEUP and ONC members in 2004. Authorities also took no action against police who in 2004 detained hundreds of Oromo students and teachers for several weeks in detention centers on suspicion of being supporters of the OLF.

Thousands of criminal suspects reportedly remained in pretrial detention, some for years. Some of the detainees were teachers and students from the Oromiya region accused of involvement in OLF activities or arrested after student unrest broke out in Oromiya in 2004.

The government continued to detain several persons without charge at the Gondar prison, some of whom had been in custody for years, while the police investigated their cases.

Amnesty

On September 10, the government granted its first amnesty in 30 years. This decision by the federal and regional pardon boards secured the release of nearly 10,000 prisoners, which represented approximately 15 percent of the total prison population. In total 237 prisoners were freed from federal prisons, and 26 others, including 11 death row inmates, were given reduced sentences. The remaining were released from regional prisons: 3,995 from Amhara; 2,435 from Oromo; 1,100 from Tigray; 2,400 (approximately) from the Southern National and Nationalities Region; and 43 from Gambella. Convicted rapists and those jailed for corruption were not included in the amnesty.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

While the law provides for an independent judiciary, the judiciary remained weak and overburdened. The judiciary was perceived to be subject to significant political intervention.

The government continued to decentralize and restructure the judiciary along federal lines with the establishment of courts at the district, zonal, and regional levels. The federal high court and the federal Supreme Court heard and adjudicated original and appeal cases involving federal law, transregional issues, and national security. The regional judiciary was increasingly autonomous and often heard regional cases.

Regional offices of the federal Ministry of Justice monitored local judicial developments. Some regional courts had jurisdiction over both local and federal matters, as the federal courts in those jurisdictions had not begun operation; overall, the federal judicial presence in the regions was limited. Anecdotal evidence suggested that some local officials believed they were not accountable to a higher authority. Pending the passage of regional legislation, federal procedural and substantive codes guide all judges.

To remedy the severe lack of experienced staff in the judicial system, the government continued to identify and train lower court judges and prosecutors, although officials acknowledged that salaries did not attract the desired number of competent professionals.

Trial Procedures

According to the law, accused persons have the right to a fair public trial by a court of law within a "reasonable time," the right to a presumption of innocence, the right to be represented by legal counsel of their choice, and the right to appeal. Despite these protections, closed proceedings occurred, at times authorities allowed detainees little or no contact with their legal counsel (see section 1.d.), and detainees usually were not presumed innocent. The Public Defender's Office provides legal counsel to indigent defendants, although its scope remained severely limited, particularly with respect to SPO trials. Although the law explicitly stipulates that persons charged with corruption are to be shown the body of evidence against them prior to their trials, authorities routinely denied defense counsel access to such evidence before trial.

The law provides legal standing to some pre existing religious and customary courts and allows federal and regional legislatures to recognize other courts. By law, all parties to a dispute must agree that a customary or religious court will be used before it may hear a case. Shari'a (Islamic) courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims. In addition, other traditional systems of justice, such as councils of elders, continued to function. Although not sanctioned by law, these traditional courts resolved disputes for the majority of citizens who lived in rural areas and generally had little access to formal judicial systems.

The federal first instance court's seventh criminal branch handled cases of sexual abuse against women and children.

Three federal judges sat on one bench to hear all cases involving juvenile offenses. There was a large backlog of juvenile cases, and accused children often remained in detention with adults until officials heard their cases.

The military justice system lacked adequately trained staff to handle a growing caseload. Foreign assistance to train military justice officials resumed during the year.

On December 12, following a 12-year trial, 57 top officials from the former Derg regime, including former communist dictator Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, were found guilty of genocide, treason and murder for crimes committed during their 17 years of rule. Twenty-seven

of those convicted, including Colonel Mengistu, were tried in absentia, as they had fled the country. Their sentencing was pending at year's end. By the end of the reporting period, courts had convicted 1,018 persons involved with the Derg regime of crimes related to their role in atrocities, while 5,000 to 6,000 others remained on trial in other cases.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

The total number of political prisoners and detainees during the year was estimated to be in the hundreds.

The CUD leadership, civil society members, human rights defenders, and journalists arrested following the demonstrations in November 2005 remained on trial at year's end, facing charges of treason, attempted genocide, and "outrages against the constitution," among other serious charges carrying potential punishments of life in prison or death. Those on trial included Addis Ababa mayor-elect Berhanu Nega, former UN Rwanda Tribunal prosecutor Yacob Hailemariam, human rights activist Mesfin Woldemariam, ActionAid representative Daniel Bekele, Netsanet Demissie, and federal parliamentarian Kifle Tigneh, among other prominent individuals. Nearly 200 defendants, ranging in age from 18 to 76, were being prosecuted in four separate cases in Addis Ababa. Five Voice of America (VOA) journalists were among those initially charged, although their cases were dropped following international pressure.

The 200 political prisoners on trial in the Addis Ababa federal system were held in two separate prisons, Kaliti and Kerchele, often under harsh conditions. In March CUD Secretary General Muluheh Eyoel was placed in solitary confinement at Kerchele prison. In August fellow CUD member Andualem Arage, along with journalists Sisay Agena and Eskinder Nega, were placed in solitary confinement.

During their incarceration, several political prisoners experienced serious health problems. Some were taken to a special prison hospital, where they were treated and returned to detention facilities, while others complained of not having received any treatment. During the year pregnant journalist Serkalem Fassil prematurely gave birth while in detention at Kaliti. She was refused permission to remain in the hospital to nurse. The baby's father, fellow journalist Eskinder Nega, was kept in solitary confinement and was not allowed to see his child.

Family members reported that the political prisoners were denied proper light, mattresses and, adequate bathroom facilities. Several defendants and families complained of having their visitation rights restricted on a number of occasions during the year. The visitation rules for political prisoners were more restrictive than the rules for other prisoners held in the same facilities. The ICRC was not permitted regular access to political prisoners (see section 1.d).

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The law provides citizens the right to appeal human rights violations in civil court; however, no such cases were filed during the year. Additionally, the Human Rights Commission, an office established by parliament to record human rights violations, was intended to act as a clearinghouse for human rights complaints from individual citizens. The commission had not yet established this capacity by year's end.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law requires authorities to obtain judicial search warrants to search private property; however, in practice, particularly outside Addis Ababa, police often searched property without obtaining warrants (see section 1.d.). Opposition party representatives claimed that police sometimes used fraudulent warrants to enter homes and commit criminal acts, including extorting money. There were reports that members of the federal police robbed persons during the year, including through the use of false warrants.

There continued to be reports of police forcibly entering civilian homes. During and following antigovernment demonstrations in June and November 2005, security forces entered homes and searched premises without warrants, took thousands of persons from their homes in the middle of the night without warrants, and often detained family members or other residents.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports from opposition party members that authorities burned down their homes and looted their offices.

All electronic communications facilities were state owned. Political party leaders reported incidents of phone-tapping and other electronic eavesdropping.

The government used a widespread system of paid informants to report on the activities of particular individuals.

There were reports during the year of the forced displacement of families in rural areas. The government stated that its resettlement program, which moved families from drought prone areas to more fertile lands, was entirely voluntary, but opposition parties accused local authorities in some rural areas of targeting opposition supporters for resettlement by manipulating resettlement rosters. Media reports indicated that in several instances, the government resettled persons in areas with no existing infrastructure or clean water supply, resulting in unusually high rates of infant mortality.

During the year there continued to be credible reports from EHRCO and opposition parties that in certain rural areas in the Oromiya region; Amhara region; and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples region; local officials used threats of land redistribution and withholding of food aid and fertilizer to garner support for the ruling coalition. There were many reports of ruling party or government harassment intended to prevent individuals from joining opposition parties or from renting property to them. There were numerous reports of more serious forms of harassment and violence directed against members of opposition parties in many areas of the country, including beatings, house burnings, and killings (see sections 1.c., 1.d., 3, and 5).

There also were credible reports that teachers and other government workers had their employment terminated if they belonged to opposition political parties. According to the opposition Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Coalition (SEPDC), the regional government continued to dismiss SEPDC members--particularly teachers--from their jobs.

The law imposes a six month waiting period on anyone seeking to remarry following a divorce or the death of one's spouse (see section 5). The government maintained that this waiting period was necessary to determine whether a woman may still be carrying the child of her former spouse. In practice this was not enforced, although the official overseeing such weddings may request a pregnancy test to show the woman was not pregnant from a previous marriage. Any interested party may request a written official explanation of why a wedding was allowed to occur within the waiting period.

Security forces continued to detain family members of persons sought for questioning by the government.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

While the constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and press, the government restricted these rights in practice. The government continued to harass and prosecute journalists, publishers, and editors for publishing allegedly fabricated information and for other violations of the press law. The government continued to control all broadcast media. Private and government journalists routinely practiced self censorship.

Government-controlled media reflected mostly the views of the government and the ruling EPRDF coalition. However, live radio and television broadcasts at times included televised parliamentary debate and broadcast the views of opposition parliamentarians, as did government newspapers. Relations between the private press and the government were not as strained as in the period immediately following the elections and the disturbances of June and November 2005, but the majority of private media existing in 2005 was effectively silenced by the closures of several publications and self-censorship following arrests and indictments of journalists.

Government actions against the private press that began during the May 2005 elections effectively silenced most private newspapers. Local journalists complained of constant government harassment as well as more subtle forms of censorship, including pressure on printers not to print the newspapers. As a result, the number of private newspapers available in Addis Ababa decreased dramatically from the period prior to the election to the end of the year. Eight newspapers were banned after their publishers and editors-in-chief were arrested. Six others newspapers ceased publication directly as a result of the government's crackdown or the government-owned printing presses refusal to print the papers. The closed papers had a combined total weekly circulation of approximately 400,000. Following the crackdown, only approximately 40,000 copies of the six remaining private Amharic language political papers were in circulation.

Foreign journalists at times published articles critical of the government but were subjected to government pressure to self-censor their coverage. During the year some reporters were expelled from the country for publishing articles critical of the government.

On January 21, Associated Press correspondent Anthony Mitchell was given 24 hours to leave the country a day after reporting on renewed clashes between police and protesters in Addis Ababa. The state-owned Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) said the government had decided to expel Mitchell for "tarnishing the image of the nation repeatedly, contravening journalism ethics," and "disseminating information far from the truth about Ethiopia." Mitchell, a foreign citizen who also worked for the UN news agency IRIN had worked in the country for more than five years.

On February 21, foreign journalist Inigo Gilmore was denied press accreditation by the Ministry of Information. In December 2005 Gilmore had published an article in the British newspaper The Observer headlined "Ethiopian leader accused over human rights," which included accounts of alleged human rights abuses in the wake of election protests.

On June 23, the Ministry of Information suspended publication of the English-language weekly The Sub-Saharan Informer on the pretext that the paper had not informed the Ministry of Information of its change of office address, which it had done twice in writing. The paper was granted permission to resume publication on August 18.

On February 10, the government issued the first broadcasting licenses allowing two private radio stations to operate in the country. By year's end neither of the two stations was operational. The Ethiopian Broadcasting Agency (EBA) said it had selected the two stations, Zami Public Connections and Tensae Fine Arts, from among 12 contenders on the basis of their financial status and proposed program content.

In August the Southern Regional State announced plans to begin radio broadcasts by launching six FM stations. Also in August, EBA issued a license for a community radio station, the Kori Community Radio, in the Southern Regional State.

On August 25, EBA issued a commercial license to the ruling EPRDF party-affiliated Radio Fana. Radio Ethiopia sold broadcasting time to private groups and individuals who wanted to air programs and commercials.

The Addis Ababa City Administration Mass Media Agency continued its five-hour Amharic FM broadcast as well as a three-hour local television program broadcast twice daily from the capital city.

The government operated the sole television station and tightly controlled news broadcasts. The broadcasting law prohibits political and religious organizations from owning broadcast stations. The law also prohibits foreign ownership.

There were restrictions on access to international news broadcasts during the year. VOA broadcast signals were subject to intentional jamming. The government permitted ownership of private satellite receiving dishes; however, high costs and the limited capacity of the sole telecommunications entity, the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation, effectively restricted access to this technology.

The government continued to use statutory provisions on the publication of false information, incitement of ethnic hatred and libel to justify the arrest and detention of journalists. Along with opposition party members, 16 journalists were charged with treason, genocide, and attempts to subvert the constitution, charges which carry maximum penalties of life in prison or the death penalty.

In November 2005 five VOA journalists were included in a group of CUD leaders, members of civil society, and journalists charged with treason and attempting to subvert the constitution. On March 23, following pressure from foreign governments, the federal high court dropped the charges of treason and genocide against the VOA journalists and 13 others.

Between December 2005 and May, several journalists were convicted on charges stemming from news stories published as long ago as 1998, including libel, publishing false news, failing to print the name of the deputy editor in the newspaper, defaming the government, and misinformation. Prison sentences ranged from three months to 18 months. Some of the sentenced journalists were released from jail on bail after being detained for a few weeks or months. Bail amounts ranged from \$56 to \$1,260 (487 to 10,962 birr). The journalists released on bail earlier in the year had court appearances in October and November.

On November 10, Getachew Sime, former editor-in-chief of the defunct Amharic language weekly, Agere, appeared in court to appeal his December 2005 defamation conviction and three-month prison sentence. The Federal Supreme Court rejected his appeal.

Leykun Engeda, former editor-in-chief and publisher of the Amharic language weekly Dagim Wonchif, was granted \$116 (1,000 birr) bail on January 5, after he appealed to the Federal Supreme Court. In November his appeal was rejected and he was sent to Kaliti Prison. The case against Engeda stemmed from a 1999 article in Dagim Wonchif about a rebel organization known as the Ethiopian Patriotic Front, alleging that the rebels had won a military victory against government soldiers. Dagim Wonchif went out of business, ostensibly due to problems encountered in obtaining newsprint.

On February 21, Arega Wolde Kirkos, editor-in-chief of the private Amharic language weekly, Tobia, was arrested on defamation charges. After appealing to the Federal Supreme Court for the charges against him to be dropped, he was released on bail of approximately \$110 (1,000 birr). Arega appeared in court in November and the charges against him were dropped.

On March 8, Abraham Gebre Kidan, editor of the now-defunct Amharic-language weekly, Politika, was sentenced to one year in prison for publishing "false news" in a 2002 report attributed to the BBC, which claimed that the government was training rebels in neighboring Eritrea. Kidan was subsequently released on bail of approximately \$110 (1,000 birr). He appeared in court in November, at which time the charge against him was dropped and he was released.

Two journalists indicted on old charges, Wossonseged Gebrekidan and Tesehalene Mengesha, remained in prison at year's end. On April 18, Wossonseged Gebrekidan, editor-in-chief of the now banned Addis Zena, was sentenced to 16 months' imprisonment for defamation stemming from a 2002 article that allegedly defamed the editor of Abiotawi Democracy, a publication of the ruling EPRDF. At the time of his sentencing, Gebrekidan was already in jail on anti-government charges as one of fourteen journalists on trial along with opposition leaders and members of civil society for allegedly trying to overthrow the constitutional order.

On April 25, Abraham Retta, a journalist who freelanced for a number of different Amharic-language newspapers, and worked as a columnist for the private Amharic weekly Addis Admas, was sentenced on April 25 to one year and jailed the same day. Retta was charged for an article in the now-defunct private Amharic newspaper, Ruh, reporting that government officials had embezzled World Bank assistance funds in 2002. Retta appealed his sentence to the Federal Supreme Court; he appeared in court in November and his case was postponed and remained pending at year's end.

On May 4, Tesehalene Mengesha, former editor of the defunct Amharic-language weekly, Mebruk, was convicted of criminal defamation and sentenced to 16 months in prison. Mengesha also faced additional pending charges for "spreading false information" related to a report in the then private Amharic-language weekly, Mebrek, on the assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak when he arrived in Addis Ababa in 1995 to attend a summit of the Organization of African Unity.

On February 19, Goshu Moges, journalist and manager of the opposition private Amharic-language weekly newspaper Lissane Hizb was arrested in what police described as a "crackdown on terrorists linked to Ethiopia's opposition parties." Moges was charged with seeking to "overthrow, modify, or suspend the constitution." He was denied bail and remained in custody at year's end. Lissane Hizb was not explicitly banned by the government but remained unable to publish since November 2005, due to arrests of the paper's leadership and fear of arrest on the part of the remaining staff.

On May 4, Tesehalene Mengesha, former editor of the defunct Amharic-language weekly, Mebruk, was convicted of criminal defamation and sentenced to 16 months in prison. The case stemmed from an article published in Mebruk during the 1998-2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean border war. Mengesha had previously been jailed at least three times between 1997 and 2000 in connection with his work for Mebruk.

Eskinder Nega, editor of the newspaper Satenaw and one of the 16 journalists being tried with the CUD leadership, was kept in a separate prison in solitary confinement. Nega's partner, journalist Serkalem Fassil, was also arrested and detained at Kaliti prison. Another of the 16 journalists imprisoned on treason charges, Sisay Agena, publisher of the weekly newspaper Ethiop, was also moved to Kerchele prison in August and kept in a dark cell (see section 1.d.).

In January 2005 authorities arrested Shiferaw Insemu, a journalist with the Oromo-language service of the state-owned Ethiopian Television (ETV), for the third time, at the central criminal investigation office prison in Addis Ababa. Insemu and fellow ETV journalist Dhabassa Wakjira, who was arrested in April 2004, remained in detention on several charges, including passing government information to the OLF leadership. Prison authorities ignored various court orders to free them.

Police asked Addis Zena editor-in-chief Fasil Yenealem to disclose his sources for two stories, including a May 2005 article reporting that the ruling EPRDF had established a special intelligence force to arrest and assassinate CUD leaders, and had recruited 11 Tigrayan women to poison CUD leaders. Yenealem did not reveal his sources and was subsequently arrested for publishing a story that could not be corroborated. Yenealem was released on bail later in 2005 but was one of the journalists detained along with the CUD leadership on anti-state crimes. He remained in prison at year's end.

In June 2005 government security forces detained Addis Ababa newspaper distributor Fikre Gudu and held him for one month. After his release, he gave an interview to the private Amharic-language weekly *Asqal* discussing his arrest and subsequent imprisonment in a detention center outside the capital. He described poor prison conditions and criticized the government for jailing him. Authorities detained him again in August 2005; they released him on bail after four days in police detention. During his latest detention, police accused Gudu of using the interview to spread false information and to defame the police and prison system. No information was available on whether the case against Gudu was still pending.

All official media received government subsidies; however, the official media were legally autonomous and responsible for their own management and partial revenue generation. The minister of information was the government's official spokesperson, and the ministry managed contacts between the government, the press, and the public; however, the government routinely refused to respond to queries from the private press and often limited its cooperation with the press to the government-run Ethiopian News Agency, the EPRDF-controlled *Walta* news agency, and correspondents of international news organizations.

Unlike in previous years, the prime minister's office allowed some members of the independent press limited access to official events. On April 30, for only the second time in 14 years, members of the independent press were invited to join state media and foreign correspondents in covering a press conference given by the prime minister. Later in the year, journalists from local English-language independent newspapers were invited to a press conference that had been opened to foreign correspondents. Independent journalists were also invited along with foreign correspondents to attend a press conference by the prime minister on Somalia in December.

The Ministry of Information required that newspapers maintain a bank balance of \$1,150 (10,000 birr) when annually registering for a publishing license. This sum effectively precluded some smaller publications from registering. Authorities also required permanent residency for publishers to establish and operate a newspaper. The government did not require residency for other business owners, and some independent journalists maintained that the government used the residency requirement as a form of intimidation. The press law requires all publishers to provide free copies of their publications to the Ministry of Information on the day of publication.

The majority of private newspapers as well as government newspapers printed their publications on government owned presses. Following the unrest in November 2005, presses frequently refused to print some papers, citing Ministry of Justice statements indicating that presses would be held responsible for content they printed. Police had the authority to shut down any printing press without a court order but during the year did not exercise that power.

The Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFJA) remained in disarray following the crackdown on the private press. Several journalists remained in exile, including EFJA president Kifle Mulat. His name was on the list of journalists being sought by the government for their involvement in what the government called treason and attempted genocide. The detention of most of its members effectively halted the EFJA's operation. Another association, the Ethiopian National Union of Journalists, established with the support of the government, was inactive during the year.

Internet Freedom

Beginning in mid-May, several "blogs" (Internet journals) and media watchdog groups alleged that the government had begun blocking various websites that displayed content critical of the government. This was corroborated by members of the general public in Addis Ababa. Blocked websites included the site of the Oromo Liberation Front and several news blogs and sites run by the Ethiopian diaspora, including the *Ethiopian Review*, *CyberEthiopia.com*, *Quatero Amharic Magazine*, *Tensae Ethiopia*, and the *Ethiopian Media Forum*. The Committee to Protect Journalists and others called upon the government to stop blocking these sites. Officials at the Ministry of Information claimed that they had no explanation or information about the sudden inaccessibility of the blogs, and denied that the government was responsible.

In December 2005 Elias Kifle, the publisher of web-based *Ethiopian Review*, was charged in absentia with treason. Frezer Negash, an Addis Ababa-based correspondent for the website, was imprisoned without charge from January 27 to March 8.

CPJ noted that the government's crackdown on the traditional print media and the resulting widespread self-censorship in the press had spurred many local journalists and social and political activists to use the Internet.

On December 24, *Capital*, a private English-language newsweekly reported that the Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency was distributing forms for Internet cafes in the country and requiring them to register their internet users. Sources told *Capital* that the telecommunications agency was working with the federal police to distribute the forms to all Internet cafes in Addis Ababa and other major towns in order to identify illegal users. Sources said that if an Internet cafe was found serving unregistered customers its owners would be jailed.

Media reported that citizens used the Internet frequently and consistently and that access had increased through the proliferation of Internet

cafes. Voice-over-Internet-Protocol technology also became increasingly popular for communicating with family and friends overseas. Capital reported that the number of Internet users in Addis Ababa in late 2004 was estimated at 100,000. Approximately 94 percent of the country's Internet users lived in Addis Ababa; this was an indication of the relative lack of telecommunications infrastructure outside of the capital. Capital also reported that the telecommunications corporation has made it easier and more affordable for home users to subscribe to dial-up Internet service. By year's end the country had 40,000 home-based Internet subscribers.

Mobile phone text messaging remained blocked by the state telecommunications monopoly following claims that the opposition CUD had used text messaging to call for and coordinate antigovernment actions.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom during the year, maintaining that professors could not espouse political sentiments. Authorities did not permit teachers at any level to deviate from official lesson plans and discouraged political activity and association of any kind on university campuses. Reports continued throughout the year of both uniformed and plainclothes police officers being present on and around university and high school campuses. The government arrested students and teachers during the year. Professors and students were discouraged from taking positions not in accordance with government beliefs or practices. There was a lack of transparency in academic decisions, with numerous complaints from individuals in the academic community of bias based on ethnicity and/or religion. The freedoms of speech, expression, and assembly were frequently restricted on university and high school campuses.

In September the Ministry of Culture and Tourism banned performance of a musical drama entitled "WAI ADDIS ABABA," at the Ethiopian National Theatre. The script was written by playwright Getenet Eneyew. Officials from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism attended a technical rehearsal before the play opened and informed the theater company that the play was to be canceled.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly. Prior to the May 2005 national elections, there were numerous opposition rallies, including one that occurred in Addis Ababa that was attended by nearly one million persons the weekend prior to the elections. However, immediately following the elections and throughout the year, the government restricted this right in practice. From May 2005 to year's end, the government granted only one permit allowing a public demonstration to take place.

Organizers of large public meetings or demonstrations must notify the government 72 hours in advance and obtain a permit.

Opposition political parties reported that during the year their supporters were targets of frequent and systematic harassment and violence by government security forces, often after leaving meetings. EHRCO reported that regional governments, including the Addis Ababa regional administration, infringed on the right of peaceful assembly and association.

The OFDM reported that cadres seized and destroyed membership cards of OFDM supporters, disrupted OFDM political meetings, and detained OFDM members in police stations and army camps.

No actions were taken against police who in 2004 reportedly beat demonstrators protesting the government's decision to transfer the capital of Oromiya from Addis Ababa to Adama or against police who forced hundreds of detained student protestors in 2004 to kneel and run barefoot on gravel for hours (see section 1.c.). It was unknown at year's end whether any persons detained in previous years for holding illegal meetings remained in detention.

During the year attacks by police, the army, and militia against members of the opposition and the general public decreased, largely due to the fact that no public assembly permits were issued and illegal demonstrations were limited.

Freedom of Association

Although the law provides for freedom of association and the right to engage in unrestricted peaceful political activity, the government in practice limited this right. The Ministry of Justice registers and licenses NGOs, and there was some improvement in transparency of the NGO registration process. The government continued to deny registration to the Human Rights League (see section 4).

As provided by law, the government required political parties to register with the National Election Board (NEB). In 2005 the NEB's independence was called into question when it made a series of decisions limiting the political activity of opposition parties, including the rejection of the CUD merger and unwillingness to recognize the CUD coalition after the elections. However, during the year, the NEB permitted the registration of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP), a party made up of former CUD members who joined parliament. The NEB continued to limit political activity of the ONC by not recognizing a change in the party leadership.

During the year the UEDF, CUD, and ONC reported arrests of their members and the forced closure of most political party offices throughout the country (see section 1.d.). There were credible reports that the government used legal means to harass leadership from an influential opposition political party, utilizing government agencies to restrict party control and membership.

During the year political leaders, including members of federal and regional parliaments, were prevented from traveling to their

constituencies and meeting with supporters. The president of the OFDM, who was also a member of the federal parliament, was prevented from visiting his home town of Bogi Dirmeji, Oromiya region, and threatened by local police when attempting to do so. In addition, of 42 ONC federal parliamentarians, only three were able to meet with their constituents during the year. The three reported that following meetings with local representatives, party members were harassed and detained by local security forces.

There were no developments in the 2004 suspension of the MTA and arrests of its members. Some arrests appeared to have been made without warrants, and some detentions continued despite court orders to release suspects (see section 1.d.).

The ETA continued to encounter government restrictions when attempting to hold meetings. On August 30, police interrupted a national assembly of ETA leadership and seized documents and other materials. Local police occupied and sealed the conference room where the meetings were held. However, police returned most of the seized items.

This incident followed a series of attempts by the government to limit the activity of the ETA. The ETA had operated since 1967, but in 1993, when the EPRDF took power, an alternate, pro-EPRDF ETA was established. In 1993 the original ETA and the government-supported ETA began prolonged legal battles over the organization name and property rights. Although the original ETA received favorable judgments in lower courts, the newly formed ETA appealed to the Supreme Court. In the meantime, security forces closed the original ETA offices and continued to harass its members.

c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution and law provide for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice; however, local authorities occasionally infringed on this right. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and Islam are the dominant religions; nearly 90 percent of the population adhered to one or the other faith.

While the government required that religious institutions annually register with the Ministry of Justice, there were no reports of government action against institutions that chose not to register. Under the law, a religious organization that undertakes development activities must register its development wing separately as an NGO. The government did not issue work visas to foreign religious workers unless they were associated with the development wing of a religious organization.

Some religious property confiscated under the Mengistu (Derg) regime had not been returned by year's end.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Minority religious groups reported discrimination in the allocation of government land for religious sites. Authorities banned a traditional animist Oromo religious group because it suspected that the group's leaders had close links to the OLF and MTA. Protestant groups occasionally reported that local officials discriminated against them when they sought land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders stated that because authorities perceived them as "newcomers," they were at a disadvantage compared with the EOC and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) in the allocation of land. The EIASC reported that it faced more difficulty obtaining land from the government than did the EOC, while others believed that the government favored the EIASC. Officials targeted for demolition many mosques that squatters had built without city government approval.

In late September and early October, a series of clashes between Muslims and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians near the city of Jima left 12 dead and numerous churches and homes burned. The disturbances began on September 26 on the eve of the Meskel holiday, when smoke from a holiday bonfire set by Christians entered a nearby mosque. This led to violent fighting between large groups of Muslims and Christians, leading to eight deaths, the burning of churches and homes, and subsequent mass arrests of Muslims by local police. On October 4, four more persons were killed in a nearby village, when Muslims stormed an Ethiopian Orthodox church, setting it on fire and attacking churchgoers with machetes. Police made several arrests, but at year's end courts had not yet sentenced anyone arrested in connection with either incident.

On July 24, due to a lack of proper construction permits, the city administration dismantled a converted mosque in Addis Ababa. On the subsequent three Fridays, local Muslims demonstrated in Addis Ababa to protest, resulting in clashes with security forces and arrests and minor injuries of protestors. The situation was resolved when the Addis Ababa city administration granted land to the Muslim community for the construction of a new mosque on an alternate site.

The Jewish community numbered approximately 2,000. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2006 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

Although the law provides for these rights, the government restricted some of these rights in practice.

Throughout the year in the Gambella region, the government continued to monitor and sometimes control the passage of relief supplies and access by humanitarian organizations, explaining that it was doing so as a matter of security for those traveling in the region.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not force any citizens into exile. A number of persons remained abroad in self

imposed exile, including 54 journalists (see section 2.a.).

During the year the ICRC repatriated 988 Ethiopians from Eritrea and repatriated 83 Eritreans. Most Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin registered with the government and received identity cards and six month renewable residence permits that allowed them to gain access to hospitals and other public services. However, there were anecdotal reports that local government officials denied indigent Eritreans the right to free medical services.

During the year the UNHCR processed 680 cases for resettlement in third countries, totaling 1,800 individuals, mainly from Sudan and Eritrea.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The 1998-2000 war with Eritrea produced approximately 350,000 IDPs. Of these, humanitarian agencies resettled an estimated 225,000. The UNHCR estimated there were approximately 200,000 IDPs in the country, including approximately 62,000 in Tigray region, 44,700 in Gambella region, approximately 30,000 in the Borena area of the Oromiya region, and 50,000 on the border of the Oromiya and Somali regions.

Violent clashes between different ethnic groups during the year internally displaced thousands of persons and resulted in deaths and injuries (see section 5).

Protection of Refugees

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. In practice the government provided protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where they feared persecution, and granted refugee status or asylum. The government generally cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and returning citizens.

The government, in cooperation with UNHCR, also continued to provide temporary protection to individuals from Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 convention and the 1967 protocol.

At year's end the country hosted approximately 97,300 refugees. This number did not reflect a significant change from the end of 2005; an increase in the numbers of asylum seekers from Eritrea was offset by the repatriation of approximately 5,000 refugees to South Sudan.

During the year the government and UNHCR sought to open a new camp in Tigray region in order to accommodate the increasing number of Eritrean asylum seekers residing in the Shimelba camp. After one potential site was abandoned due to the lack of potable water, the government and UNHCR agreed to continue to transfer newly arriving Eritrean refugees to Shimelba camp, and use some of the money set aside for the construction of the new camp for health, education, and sanitation projects for the host community near the camp, since this population had expressed their displeasure with the number of asylum seekers living in the area.

The conflict between ethnic groups in the Gambella region complicated UNHCR refugee protection efforts (see section 5). Food deliveries to refugees continued in spite of the crisis in the West; however, humanitarian organizations at times were unable to adequately monitor deliveries due to travel restrictions.

The government required that all refugees reside and remain at designated camps, most of which were located near the Eritrean, Somaliland, and Sudanese borders, unless granted permission to live elsewhere in the country. Such permission was given primarily to attend higher education institutions, undergo medical treatment, or avoid security threats at the camps.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution and law provide citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through generally free and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage; however, irregularities and intimidation of voters and election observers marred polling in many areas in the 2005 election. In practice the EPRDF ruling party dominated the government.

The government policy of ethnic federalism led to the creation of individual constituencies to ensure representation of all major ethnic groups in the House of Peoples' Representatives. Nevertheless, small ethnic groups lacked representation in the legislature. There were 23 nationality groups in six regional states that did not have a sufficient population to qualify for constituency seats; however, in the May 2005 elections, individuals from these nationality groups competed for 23 special seats in the 547 seat House of Peoples' Representatives.

Elections and Political Participation

According to domestic and international observers, the May 2005 national elections, in which the EPRDF coalition won 372 of 547 seats, generally reflected the will of the people. Opposition parties made an unexpectedly strong showing, increasing their parliamentary representation from 12 seats to 172.

Irregularities, including intimidation of voters and election observers, marred polling in many areas. The government and EPRDF also

announced the "final" election results before the NEB released them. Observers reported killings, disappearances, voter intimidation and harassment, and unlawful detentions of opposition party supporters, particularly in the Amhara, Oromiya, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples regions (see sections 1.a., 1.b., and 1.d.). The Carter Center expressed concern over reports of improper vote counting and tabulation, stating that its observer teams had "found evidence that ballot boxes have been moved improperly, were improperly secured, or that party agents were barred from polling stations or were not allowed to watch the entire count." It also reported "election day and postelection intimidation and harassment." The head of the European Union's Electoral Observation Mission issued a preliminary report stating that the post-election complaint review process "did not live up to international standards," citing irregularities in key areas. In spite of these criticisms, international observers noted that the elections were an important step forward in the country's democratization efforts.

Following the election, opposition parties accused the NEB of being an instrument of the ruling party and of failing to act when informed of electoral irregularities, including ballot stuffing, vote count fraud, bribery, killings, beatings, and widespread intimidation and harassment by ruling party supporters during the national elections.

In June 2005 negotiations between the ruling and major opposition parties over election complaints resulted in an agreement to adopt an ad hoc complaints resolution process to deal with the large number of unresolved electoral complaints. According to the Carter Center, 44 different complaints investigation panels conducted formal investigations and hearings in 178 constituencies across the country, resulting in a decision by the NEB to hold new elections in 31 constituencies. New elections were held in those constituencies in August 2005.

In September and October 2005 the government and opposition leaders participated in discussions on the opposition's participation in the House of People's Representatives. While most UEDF members decided to take their seats in the house, some CUD leaders announced they would boycott the federal parliament, as well as regional parliaments and the Addis Ababa City Council. However, by year's end most elected CUD members had joined parliament. In late October the CUD called for civil disobedience measures, such as horn-honking, boycotting EPRDF-owned business, and ostracizing alleged government supporters, which the government publicly declared illegal.

Beginning on November 1, 2005, violent antigovernment protests allegedly organized by the opposition occurred in Addis Ababa, and the government arrested several dozen opposition leaders, as well as members of the independent media and civil society groups, for alleged participation in unlawful activities. Security forces also detained between 30,000 and 50,000 demonstrators without charge. Military intervention led to widespread abuses such as arbitrary detention and killings. Security forces arrested at least 12 of the 20 CUD party executive committee members, including party president Hailu Shawel, vice chairman Bertukan Mideksa, secretary-general Muluneh Eyoel, and Addis Ababa mayor-elect Dr. Berhanu Nega, on charges of treason and genocide, among others (see section 1.e.).

The EPRDF, its affiliates, and EPRDF supporters controlled all seats in the 108 member House of Federation, whose members were appointed by regional governments and by the federal government. Membership in the EPRDF conferred advantages upon its members, and the party owned many businesses and awarded jobs to loyal supporters.

The largest opposition party in the House of Peoples Representatives was the newly formed CUDP, composed of former CUD coalition members, which held 61 seats.

Registered political parties must receive permission from regional governments to open local offices. Opposition parties, such as the CUDP, the UEDF, and the OFDM, claimed that the pattern of widespread intimidation and violence directed against members of opposition political parties by local government officials continued throughout the year. Opposition parties and the press reported hundreds of such cases, including killings, beatings, arrests, house burnings, and property confiscation.

During the year there were many cases reported of authorities allegedly telling opposition members that they had to renounce their party membership if they wanted access to fertilizer, other agricultural services, health care, or other benefits controlled by the government. Authorities often disrupted or unlawfully banned opposition party meetings.

There were no new developments in the EPRDF's dissolution in late 2003 and early 2004 of offices of the Konso People's Democratic Union (KPDU) and the KPDU-dominated Abaroba and Jarsso local councils, or in the arrest and beatings of KPDU members. Authorities took no actions against those responsible for the 2004 stoning of AEUP member Bekele Tadesse, or for the March 2005 bombing of the home of Zemedkun Gebre Kidane, chairman of the AEUP organizing committee in Ankober District.

Of the 19 members of the Council of Ministers, two were women, and a number of women held senior positions. There were 116 women in the 547 seat House of Peoples' Representatives, a gain from 14 in the previous parliament, and 21 women in the 113-member House of Federation. Of the 14 members of the Supreme Court, three were women. During the May 2005 national elections women constituted nearly half of the community observers, party workers, and election officials at polling stations.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The Ministry of Justice has primary responsibility for combating corruption. A combination of social pressure, cultural norms, and legal restrictions limited corruption. However, government officials appeared to manipulate the privatization process, as state- and party-owned businesses received preferential access to land leases and credit. The government's decision to grant MIDROC, the country's largest foreign investor, exclusive license to import cement was perceived as favoritism toward a government ally.

The law provides for public access to government information, but access was largely restricted in practice.

The government publishes its laws and regulations in the national gazette prior to their taking effect. The Ministry of Information managed contacts between the government, the press, and the public; however, the government routinely refused to respond to queries from the

private press (see section 2.a.).

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Non-governmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated with limited government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. The government generally was distrustful and wary of domestic human rights groups and some international observers. NGOs continued to complain of restrictions on their importation of published materials and complained that they were prevented from bringing foreigner visitors into the country. In April 2005 the government expelled representatives of several foreign-based NGOs conducting electoral work and at year's end had not allowed them to return.

Two of the most prominent domestic human rights organizations were EHRCO and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA). The government routinely discounted EHRCO's reports and labeled it a political organization. In December 2005 two of EHRCO's chief investigators, Cherinet Tadesse and Yared Hailemariam, were arrested and placed on trial with 111 others including the CUD leadership (see section 1.e.).

The EWLA's primary function was to legally represent women. These and numerous other groups primarily engaged in civic and human rights education, legal assistance, and trial monitoring. However, the government neither shared information nor acknowledged the existence of human rights abuses with members of the domestic NGO community.

The government continued to investigate the Human Rights League for alleged ties to the OLF. The league's offices remained closed, and the government had not responded to its 1997 registration request by year's end, despite a court order to do so.

The government sometimes cooperated with international organizations such as the UN and ICRC; however, ICRC lacked full access to federal prisons and to political prisoners (see sections 1.c. and 1.d.).

The government is required by law to establish a human rights commission and an Office of the Ombudsman with the authority to receive and investigate complaints with respect to misadministration by executive branch offices. Both of these entities had been established, but neither organization was fully operational by year's end.

The Ministry of Justice continued to implement a three-year program of human rights training workshops for judges, prosecutors, police, and community members around the country. Election-related violence, however, severely curtailed program activities.

A parliamentary commission released its report on government human rights abuses alleged to have occurred in conjunction with ethnic violence in the Gambella region in late 2003 and 2004 (see section 5). Human Rights Watch reported in March 2005 that the commission grossly underestimated the number of deaths associated with the ethnic violence. During the year six members of the army were charged with taking part in the 2003 killing of civilians. Their trials remained ongoing at year's end.

In September two ICRC employees were kidnapped in Somali region by the United Western Somali Liberation Front. The two were released unharmed five days later.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, color, gender, language, national origin, political or other opinion, or social status; however, in practice the government did not effectively enforce these prohibitions.

Women

Domestic violence, including spousal abuse and rape, was a pervasive social problem. A July 2005 World Bank study concluded that 88 percent of rural women and 69 percent of urban women believed their husbands had the right to beat them. While women had recourse to the police and the courts, societal norms and limited infrastructure prevented many women from seeking legal redress, particularly in rural areas. The government prosecuted offenders on a limited scale.

In October 2005 the government upgraded the Women's Affairs Office to a Women's Affairs Ministry, an independent office with increased staff. Two other important offices were filled in 2005--a Commissioner for Women and Children, with the rank of Deputy Minister, was named in the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and an Ombudsperson for Women and Children was also named in the Office of the Ombudsman.

The penal code criminalizes rape but does not specifically address spousal rape. The government did not fully enforce the code due to lack of awareness of the law by the public, especially women, and a lack of capacity training, and funds. Social mores continued to be a key constraint, particularly in the rural areas.

Social mores obstructed investigations and prosecutions in rape cases, and many women were not aware of their rights under the law, which led to widespread underreporting. Observers estimated that at least 1,000 rapes occurred annually in Addis Ababa, but data based on official police reports counted only approximately 400 cases per year. The press continued to report regularly on rape cases, particularly when injury to minors resulted. Courts sentenced convicted rapists to 10 to 15 years' imprisonment, as prescribed by law.

Although illegal, the abduction of women and girls as a form of marriage continued to be a widespread practice in several regions, including the Amhara, Oromiya, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples regions, despite the government's attempts to combat the practice. Forced sexual relationships accompanied most marriages by abduction, and women often experienced physical abuse during the abduction. Abductions led to conflicts among families, communities, and ethnic groups. In cases of marriage by abduction, the perpetrator did not face punishment if the victim agreed to marry him (unless authorities annulled the marriage); even after the conviction of a perpetrator, authorities often commuted the sentence if the victim married him. Early/child marriage was also a problem, particularly in Amhara and Tigray regions, where girls were routinely married as early as age seven, despite the legal minimum age of 18 for marriage. There were some signs of growing public awareness of the problem of abuse of women and girls, including early marriage.

The majority of girls and women in the country had undergone some form of FGM. Girls typically experienced clitoridectomies seven days after birth (consisting of an excision of the clitoris, often with partial labial excision, and faced infibulation (the most extreme and dangerous form of FGM) at the onset of puberty. According to a Ministry of Health Demographic and Health survey released in 2005, the practice of FGM among all women had decreased from 80 to 74 percent, while support for the practice among women had dropped from 60 to 29 percent. The penal code criminalizes the circumcision of any female by imprisonment of not less than three months or a fine of not less than \$58 (500 birr). Likewise, infibulation of the genitals is punishable with imprisonment of five to 10 years. However, no criminal prosecutions have ever been brought for FGM.

The government took some measures to help eradicate FGM, discouraged the practice through education in public schools, and broader mass media campaigns.

The combination of pregnancy at an early age, chronic maternal malnutrition, and a lack of skilled care at delivery often led to obstetric fistulae and permanent incontinence. Approximately 8,700 women developed obstetric fistulae annually, and 27,000 women with untreated fistulae were estimated to be living in rural areas. Treatment for fistulae was available at only one hospital, the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, which annually performed over 1,000 fistula operations. It estimated that for every successful operation performed, 10 other young women needed the treatment but did not receive it. The maternal mortality rate was extremely high, partly due to food taboos for pregnant women, poverty, early marriage, and birth complications related to FGM, particularly infibulation.

Prostitution was legal for persons over age 18 and was commonly practiced around the country; however, the law prohibits pimping and benefiting from prostitution. Persons exploited in prostitution routinely reported that poverty was the principal underlying cause.

The EWLA and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that many female workers who traveled to the Middle East as industrial and domestic workers faced abuse (see section 5, Trafficking).

Sexual harassment was widespread. The penal code prescribes 18 to 24 months imprisonment; however, sexual harassment-related laws were not enforced.

Although the law provides for equality of all persons, the government did not effectively enforce these protections. The law sets the legal marriage age for girls and boys at 18, elevates civil law above customary and religious law; allows for the legal sharing of property by unmarried couples who live together for at least five years, eliminates family arbitrators as a means of settling marital disputes in lieu of the court system, allows for the joint administration of common marital property, requires the courts to take into account the situation of children or the weakest member of the family in the event of divorce or separation, and imposes a six month waiting period on women seeking to remarry following divorce or the death of a spouse. However, regional councils had authority to determine family law for their respective regions. Four regions maintained their own family law: Amhara, Tigray, Oromiya, and Addis Ababa; however, regional laws were not uniformly enforced. By law, such regional regulations could not conflict with the national constitution.

During the 2005 elections, EPRDF stipulated that 30 percent of its party candidates be women. Dozens of women successfully ran for election throughout the country, mostly on the EPRDF ticket.

Discrimination against women was most acute in rural areas, where 85 percent of the population was located. The law contains discriminatory regulations, such as the recognition of the husband as the legal head of the family and the sole guardian of children over five years old. Authorities did not consider domestic violence a serious justification for granting a divorce. There was limited legal recognition of common-law marriage. Irrespective of the number of years the marriage existed, the number of children raised, and joint property, the law entitled women to only three months' financial support if the common-law relationship ended. A husband had no obligation to provide financial assistance to his family and, as a result, women and children sometimes faced abandonment. The law states that any property owned before marriage belongs to the spouse that previously owned it. Any property gained during marriage is shared equally, although a wife does not have the right to inherit her deceased husband's share. Even with stronger formal laws, most rural residents continued to apply customary law in economic and social relationships.

All land belongs to the government. Although women could obtain government leases to land, and the government had an explicit policy to provide equal access for women to land, rural communities rarely enforced this policy. In nearly all regions women did not have access to land, except through marriage. In practice, when a husband died, other family members often took the land from his widow.

In urban areas, women had fewer employment opportunities than men, and the jobs available did not provide equal pay for equal work.

Children

The government supported efforts by domestic and international NGOs that focused on children's social, health, and legal issues, despite its limited ability to provide improved health care, basic education, or child protection.

In 2005 31.5 percent of school-age children did not attend school. As a policy, primary education was tuition free. There were not enough schools to accommodate the country's youth, particularly in rural areas, and the cost of school supplies was prohibitive for many families. In 2005 73.2 percent of male primary-school-age children and 63.6 percent of female primary-school-age children attended school; in Addis Ababa girls' attendance was significantly higher. Government reports indicated that 22.4 percent of the children who attended school left the system before they reached the second grade, and only 34.9 percent of children who began first grade completed eighth grade.

Child abuse was a problem. Members of an NGO staffed 10 child protection units in Addis Ababa's police stations to protect the rights of juvenile delinquents and juvenile victims of crime. Some police officers completed training on procedures for handling cases of child abuse and juvenile delinquency.

Societal abuse of young girls continued to be a problem. FGM was performed on the majority of girls (see section 5, Women). Other harmful traditional practices included uvulectomy, milk teeth extraction, early marriage, marriage by abduction, and food and work prohibitions.

In the Afar region older men continued to marry young girls, but media accounts suggested that this traditional practice continued to face greater scrutiny and criticism. Local NGOs, such as the Kembatta Women's Self Help Center and the Tigray Women's Association, also influenced societal attitudes toward harmful traditional practices and early marriage in their areas by raising awareness of the problems. During the year regional governments in Amhara and Tigray instituted programs to educate young women on the issues of early marriage.

According to international NGOs, child prostitution was a growing problem, particularly in urban areas. According to an NGO report, 60 percent of persons exploited in prostitution were between the ages of 16 and 25. Underage girls worked as hotel workers, barmaids, and prostitutes in resort towns and rural truck stops. Pervasive poverty, migration to urban centers, early marriage, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and limited educational and job opportunities aggravated the sexual exploitation of children. A few NGOs aided child victims, including the Forum on Street Children Ethiopia, which provided children forced into prostitution or sexual exploitation with shelter, protection, and return to their families.

NGOs reported that houses of prostitution recruited impoverished girls as young as age 11 and kept them uninformed of the risks of HIV/AIDS infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. A 2003 Family Health International Report indicated that customers particularly sought younger girls because customers believed they were free of sexually transmitted diseases.

There were occasional reports that children were trafficked out of the country, including unconfirmed reports that children from the south were transported into Kenya by traffickers operating adoption rings and adopted as other nationalities (see section 5, Trafficking).

Child labor remained a serious problem (see section 6.d.).

The government estimated the number of street children totaled 150,000 to 200,000, with approximately 50,000 to 60,000 street children in Addis Ababa. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated there were 600,000 street children in the country and more than 100,000 in the capital. UNICEF believed the problem was exacerbated because of families' inability to support children due to parental illness and decreased household income. These children begged, sometimes as part of a gang, or worked in the informal sector (see section 6.d.). Government and privately run orphanages were unable to handle the number of street children, and older children often abused younger ones. Due to severe resource constraints, hospitals and orphanages often overlooked or neglected abandoned infants. "Handlers" sometimes maimed or blinded children to raise their earnings from begging.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, there were reports that persons were trafficked from and within the country. The country was a source country for men, women, and children trafficked for forced labor and sexual exploitation. Young women were trafficked to Djibouti and the Middle East, particularly Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain for involuntary domestic labor. Some women were trafficked for sexual exploitation to Europe via Lebanon. Small numbers of men were trafficked to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states for exploitation as low-skilled laborers. Both children and adults were trafficked internally from rural to urban areas for domestic labor and, to a lesser extent, for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor, such as street vending and weaving. NGOs estimated that international trafficking annually involved between 20,000 and 25,000 victims.

The IOM reported in 2004 that trafficking was "increasing at an alarming rate." A 2003 study by a foreign government on the problem of internal trafficking of women and children confirmed that the problem was pervasive. The overwhelming majority of respondents confirmed that traffickers, typically unorganized petty criminals, lured women and children from rural areas to Addis Ababa and other urban centers with false promises of employment. Of the 459 respondents, 46 percent were illiterate and 49 percent had completed no more than an eighth-grade education. Upon arrival at their new destinations, 54 percent worked as domestic servants, but that number dropped to 9 percent as the trafficked women and children took jobs in bars, became prostitutes, or begged on the street.

Private entities arranged for overseas work and, as a result, traffickers sent women to Middle Eastern countries--particularly Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates--as domestic or industrial workers. These women typically were trafficked through Djibouti, Yemen, and Syria. They were trafficked out of the country either through the international airport in Addis Ababa, to Djibouti, or through the country's porous border with Somalia. The chief of the investigation and detention center in Lebanon reported in October 2005 that 30,000 Ethiopian women worked in Beirut, the vast majority of whom were trafficked. The government also continued registering persons seeking employment overseas.

The law provides penalties of up to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine of \$1,150 (10,000 birr) for trafficking of women and children. Despite recent arrests of suspected traffickers, there were few successful prosecutions of traffickers. Arrested traffickers were often released without

charge. However, in July a trafficker was convicted and sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment and fined \$575 (5,000 birr). The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, in concert with local police, was responsible for monitoring trafficking in persons, while the Ministry of Justice was responsible for enforcing antitrafficking laws. These entities remained generally ineffective. The government assisted with international trafficking investigations.

There were no reports that government officials participated in, facilitated, or condoned trafficking. However, border guards did not treat human trafficking as a high priority.

The government provided little assistance to trafficked victims who returned to the country. EWLA provided limited legal assistance to such victims. The federal police's Women's Affairs Bureau, in collaboration with the media, continued to implement a public awareness program on the dangers of migrating to Middle Eastern countries. There were some government initiatives during the year to combat trafficking, including government consultation with IOM. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs continued to review the contracts of prospective domestic workers planning to work overseas and rejected contracts that did not appear satisfactory. Immigration officials at the airport also continued to inspect the employment contracts of prospective workers traveling to the Middle East. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs had limited success in regulating employment agencies that sent migrant workers to Middle Eastern countries. Some illegal employment agencies escaped government scrutiny and continued to operate. The country's consulates in Beirut and Dubai continued to assist Ethiopian women trafficked to Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates.

IOM delivered training programs for judges, prosecutors, and police officers on the criminal aspects of trafficking during the year. These institutions had limited resources and jurisdiction to protect or intervene in cases of prosecution of offending employers.

Persons with Disabilities

While the law mandates equal rights for persons with disabilities, the government had no established mechanisms to enforce these rights. Persons with disabilities sometimes complained of job discrimination. The government did not mandate access to buildings or provide services for persons with disabilities. Although the law provides for rehabilitation and assistance to persons with physical and mental disabilities, the government devoted few resources to these purposes.

There were approximately seven million persons with disabilities, according to the Ethiopian National Association for the Disabled. Although there were an estimated 800,000 persons with mental disabilities, there was only one mental hospital and only an estimated 10 psychiatrists in the country. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs was responsible for protecting the rights of the disabled. Under funding from the ministry, prosthetic and orthopedic centers were established in five of the nine regional states over the past three years, albeit with limited capacity.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There were more than 80 ethnic groups living in the country, of which the Oromo was the largest, at 40 percent of the population. Although many groups influenced the political and cultural life of the country, Amharas and Tigrayans from the northern highlands played a dominant role. The federal system drew boundaries roughly along major ethnic group lines, and regional states had much greater control over their affairs than previously. Most political parties remained primarily ethnically based.

The military remained an ethnically diverse organization; however, Tigrayans dominated the senior officer corps. During the May 2005 elections and subsequent demonstrations there were many reports of Tigrayan or Gambellan troops being used in Addis Ababa and other urban centers where the opposition was strong and where officials did not consider Amhara members of the armed forces sufficiently reliable.

There were occasional reports that officials terminated the employment of teachers and other government workers if they were not of the dominant ethnic group in the region.

There were continued incidents of ethnic conflict during the year, particularly in the western, southern, and eastern areas. The OLF and the government engaged in many clashes. There were also clashes among ethnic groups in the Gambella, Somali, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples regions.

Interethnic clashes resulted in hundreds of deaths during the year. In late May and early June, at least 39 persons were killed and 34 injured in Daroor, Somali region, in a dispute between two Garhaajis subclans, the Habar Yonis and Idagaale, over construction of a water reservoir.

In June following changes by the government to zonal borderlines separating clan territories, there were violent clashes between the Guji and Borena clans in southern parts of the country, resulting in up to 150 deaths. The conflict also forced up to 120,000 persons from their homes. Ultimately, regional and local officials, in collaboration with clan elders, brokered a ceasefire and a resource-sharing agreement in July.

In September media reported that approximately 45,000 persons had been displaced from their homes in the Gambella region due to continued fighting between the region's three largest indigenous groups, the Anuak, Nuer, and Mazingir.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Homosexuality is illegal and punishable by imprisonment. Instances of homosexual activity determined to be cruel, involving coercion, or

involving a minor (age 13 to 16) are punishable by not less than three months or more than five years in prison. Where children under 13 years of age are involved, the law provides for imprisonment of five to 25 years. While society did not widely accept homosexuality, there were no reports of violence against homosexuals.

Societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS continued during the year.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides most workers with the right to form and join unions, and the government allowed this in practice. However, the law specifically excludes teachers and civil servants (including judges, prosecutors, and security service workers) from organizing unions. There was government interference in trade union activities during the year. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, many trade union leaders were removed from their posts and/or forced to leave the country, while others were sent to prison.

A minimum of 10 workers were required to form a union. While the law provides all unions with the right to register, the government may refuse to register trade unions that do not meet its registration requirements. The government retained the authority to cancel the registration of a union after consulting the appropriate courts. There were no reports that the government used this authority during the year. The law stipulates that a trade organization may not act in an overtly political manner. Approximately 300,000 workers were union members.

Seasonal and part time agricultural workers did not organize into labor unions. Compensation, benefits, and working conditions of seasonal workers were far below those of unionized permanent plantation employees.

Despite government recognition of the independent ETA, authorities required all public school teachers to subsidize a separate government created and controlled teacher's union (also called ETA) through mandatory withholding of \$0.23 (2 birr) from their monthly salaries.

In late 2003 the federal high court ruled that the government's ETA had no legal standing or claim on the property of the independent ETA, and that authorities should return the assets of the independent ETA and allow its offices to reopen. The government-controlled ETA appealed to the Supreme Court, which instructed the federal high court to reinvestigate the case. That investigation continued at year's end, and the high court's decision to recognize the independent ETA had not been implemented.

Complete government control of the government-sponsored Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions executive committee continued throughout the year, as it had since its inception.

Although the law prohibits antiunion discrimination by employers against union members and organizers, unions reported that employers frequently fired union activists. Lawsuits alleging unlawful dismissal often took years to resolve because of case backlogs in the labor courts. According to labor leaders, a number of court cases in which workers were terminated for union activities were pending after four or five years. Employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination were required to reinstate workers fired for union activities and generally did so in practice.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law protects the right of collective bargaining for most workers, and in practice the government allowed citizens to exercise this right freely. Labor experts estimated that collective bargaining agreements covered more than 90 percent of unionized workers. Representatives negotiated wages at the plant level. Unions in the formal industrial sector made some efforts to enforce labor regulations.

There are no export processing zones.

Although the constitution and law provide workers with the right to strike to protect their interests, it contains detailed provisions that make legal strike actions difficult to carry out, such as a minimum of 30 days' advance notice before striking. The law requires aggrieved workers to attempt reconciliation with employers before striking and includes a lengthy dispute settlement process. These applied equally to an employer's right to lock out workers. A majority of the workers involved must support a strike for it to occur.

During the year there were several minor strikes by construction workers who protested low wages and instances of arbitrary dismissal from work. Some of their demands were resolved through negotiation, while others remained unaddressed.

Workers nonetheless retain the right to strike without resorting to either of these options, provided they give at least 10 days' notice to the other party and to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, make efforts at reconciliation, and provide at least a 30 day warning in cases already before a court or labor relations board.

The law also prohibits strikes by workers who provide essential services, including air transport and urban bus service workers, electric power suppliers, gas station personnel, hospital and pharmacy personnel, firefighters, telecommunications personnel, and urban sanitary workers.

The law prohibits retribution against strikers, but labor leaders stated that most workers were not convinced that the government would enforce this protection. Labor officials reported that, due to high unemployment and long delays in the hearing of labor cases, some workers

were afraid to participate in strikes or other labor actions.

The labor law allows one or more permanent labor relations boards in the regional states to decide on cases involving enterprises owned by the federal government. The amendment also allows ad hoc labor relations boards in the regions to fulfill the same purpose.

In June the government further amended the labor law to provide severance pay for workers on additional grounds that were not previously provided for, such as discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS and payment of severance to those without pension plan.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

While the law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children, there were reports such practices occurred (see sections 5 and 6.d.). Courts could order forced labor as a punitive measure.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

There were laws against child labor; however, the government did not effectively implement these laws in practice, and child labor remained a serious problem, both in urban and rural areas. Under the law, the minimum age for wage or salary employment is 14 years, which was consistent with the age for completing primary school; however, the minimum age for employment was not effectively enforced. Special provisions cover children between the ages of 14 and 18, including the prohibition of hazardous or night work. By law, children between the ages of 14 and 18 were not permitted to work more than seven hours per day, work between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., work on public holidays or rest days, or perform overtime work. The government defined hazardous work as work in factories or involving machinery with moving parts, or any work that could jeopardize a child's health.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is responsible for enforcing child labor laws, but it did not provide adequate resources and oversight. While the government made some effort to enforce these regulations within the formal industrial sector, social welfare activists, civic organizers, government officials, and employers agreed that child labor was pervasive throughout the country, particularly in agrarian areas and in the informal sector. In urban areas, many children worked in a variety of jobs, including shining shoes, weaving clothes, hustling passengers into cabs, working as porters, selling lottery tickets and other small items, and herding animals. In rural areas, children worked on family and commercial farms and as domestic laborers.

A 2001 ILO funded survey on child labor found that 40 percent of children began working before the age of six. It also found the average number of hours worked in a week by children ages 5 to 17 was 32.8 hours. Approximately 13 percent of boys and girls between the ages of five and nine worked from 58 to 74 hours a week. More than two thirds of all children surveyed were giving either all or part of their earnings to their parents or guardians. Reduced household income from poor crop harvests and children dropping out of school were two factors contributing to the increased incidence of child labor.

Child laborers often faced abuse. A 1999 study concluded that compared to nonworking children, child workers faced twice as much physical and emotional abuse, five times as much sexual abuse, and eight times as much neglect. Among child workers surveyed, rapes occurred exclusively among child domestic laborers.

The government's definition of worst forms of child labor included prostitution and bonded labor. During the year there were reports of forced or bonded labor of children who had been trafficked from the Oromiya region and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples region to other regions of the country to work as domestic servants (see section 5). Family members reportedly forced young girls into prostitution (see section 5).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national minimum wage. However, some government institutions and public enterprises set their own minimum wages. Public sector employees, the largest group of wage earners, earned a monthly minimum wage of approximately \$23 (200 birr); employees in the banking and insurance sector had a minimum monthly wage of \$27 (230 birr). According to the Office of the Study of Wages and Other Remuneration, these wages did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Consequently, most families in the wage sector required at least two wage earners to survive, which forced many children to leave school early. Only a small percentage of the population was involved in wage labor employment, which was concentrated largely in urban areas.

The law provides for a 48 hour legal workweek (with a 24 hour rest period), premium pay for overtime, and prohibition of excessive, compulsory overtime. Although the government did little to enforce the law, in practice most employees in the formal sector worked a 40 hour workweek.

The government, industry, and unions negotiated to set occupational health and safety standards; however, the inspection department of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs did not effectively enforce these standards, due to a lack of resources. A lack of detailed, sector specific health and safety guidelines also inhibited enforcement. Workers had the right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without jeopardizing their employment; however, most workers feared losing their jobs if they were to do so.