



The State Department web site below is a permanent electro information released prior to January 20, 2001. Please see [y](#) material released since President George W. Bush took offic This site is not updated so external links may no longer func [us](#) with any questions about finding information.

NOTE: External links to other Internet sites should not be c endorsement of the views contained therein.



U.S. Department of State

Ethiopia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, February 26, 1999.

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia continued its transition from a unitary to a federal system of government. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi leads the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (GFDRE), which was elected in 1995 to replace a transitional government established in the aftermath of a long and brutal civil war. Most opposition groups boycotted the elections, and candidates affiliated with the dominant party within the transitional government, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), won a landslide victory in national and regional elections. Although observers judged the elections to be generally free and fair, they cited irregularities. The principal faction within the EPRDF remains Prime Minister Meles' Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF). The judiciary is weak and overburdened, but continued to show signs of independence.

Federal regions, largely organized along ethnic lines, are increasingly autonomous, having greater local control over fiscal and political issues. However, the relationship between the central Government and local officials, and among various judiciaries, has not yet been finalized. A history of highly centralized authority, great poverty, civil conflict, and unfamiliarity with democratic concepts combine to complicate the implementation of federalism. The Federal Government has considerable difficulty in protecting constitutional rights at the local level, especially when local authorities are unwilling or unable to do so. Local administrative, police, and judicial systems remain weak in many regions.

Responsibility for internal security continued to shift from the military forces to the police and local militia in most regions. Military forces conducted low-level operations against the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Somalia-based Al'ittihad terrorist organization, and elements of the Ogaden National

Liberation Front (ONLF), although there was less of this activity than in 1997. In response to the movement of Eritrean forces into territory previously administered by Ethiopia and the resulting outbreak of hostilities, the military forces engaged in hostilities with the Eritrean armed forces. The national police organization is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice. Some local officials and members of the security forces committed human rights abuses.

The economy is based on smallholder agriculture, with more than 85 percent of the estimated population of almost 61.7 million living in rural areas under very poor conditions. Per capita gross national product is estimated at \$125 (875 birr). Real economic growth in 1998 was 6 percent. Coffee accounts for about 60 percent of export revenues. The Government continued to implement an internationally supported economic reform program designed to liberalize the economy, attract foreign investment, and bring state expenditures into balance with revenues.

Serious problems still remain in the Government's human rights practices; although the Government made efforts to improve its record in a few areas, its record worsened significantly in others. Security forces sometimes beat or mistreated detainees, and arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens. These problems persisted despite government efforts to improve the security forces' human rights practices through increased training. Prisons are seriously overcrowded, and prolonged pretrial detention remains a problem. Crackdowns early in the year on suspected OLF activists resulted in the detention of approximately 100 Oromos who were held incommunicado for several days for allegedly assisting OLF activities. In response to the movement of Eritrean forces into territory previously administered by Ethiopia and the resulting outbreak of hostilities, the Government abrogated due process and detained and deported Eritreans and Ethiopian citizens of Eritrean origin. By year's end, a total of 45,000 such persons of an estimated total population of up to 400,000 had left Ethiopia for Eritrea; the vast majority were deported, although a small number left the country voluntarily to join family members who were deported. Although prompted by national security considerations, the sudden expulsions raised fundamental concerns regarding arbitrary arrest and detention, forced exile, the forcible separation of families, nationality issues, and the hardship and financial losses suffered by those who were detained or expelled. The judiciary lacks sufficient staff and funds, which limits its ability to provide citizens with the full protection provided for in the Constitution. In response, the Government sought to strengthen the judiciary; it trained additional civil and criminal judges and assigned them to regional courts and dismissed many others in an effort to eliminate judicial malfeasance. The Supreme Court introduced new rules, applicable to the entire court system, to limit the practice of carrying over cases from one session to the next, thereby speeding up the provision of justice. In a significant action, the Government released All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO) Chairman Dr. Asrat Woldeyes in December. Asrat was permitted to travel abroad for medical treatment. The Federal Prosecutor's Office suspended pending charges of treason against Asrat. The Government infringes on citizen's privacy rights. The law regarding search warrants is widely ignored.

The Government restricts freedom of the press and continued to detain or imprison journalists. The number of journalists detained or imprisoned on any given date fluctuated from a high of 22 to a low of 13 at year's end. Most were accused or convicted of inciting ethnic hatred, committing libel, or publishing false information in violation of the 1992 Press Law. Some journalists continued to practice self-censorship. Nevertheless, the private press is very active and often critical of the Government. Although the Government has not banned any newspaper or publication, the publication of some newspapers was suspended temporarily by the arrest or detention of editorial staff. On at least one occasion the Government limited freedom of assembly. While freedom of association increased, the Government still imposes limits on this right. The registration process for nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) is slow and tedious, but measurably improved during the year. Many NGO's that had long been unsuccessful in their efforts to register were registered in 1998. Nevertheless, the Government continues to refuse the registration of some NGO's. On at least one occasion local

authorities interfered with religious freedom. The Government restricted freedom of movement. Societal discrimination and violence against women and abuse of children remained problems; female genital mutilation is widespread despite active government support for groups opposed to the practice. There were instances in which young girls were sold and forced to work as prostitutes. Societal discrimination against disabled persons is a problem. Ethnic conflicts and the fighting with Eritrea displaced a large number of persons. Child labor is a problem.

The Government's Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) continued conducting the trials of persons accused of committing crimes under the brutal Marxist regime (1974-91) of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Charges have been brought against 5,198 persons. Many of those accused were held in detention for more than 6 years without formal charge. All have now been indicted and arraigned, and the testimony of victims continues to be heard in open court. However, more than half of those accused were not in custody and were charged in absentia.

In May the Government took a step towards carrying out the constitutional requirement to establish a human rights commission and office of the ombudsman by convening an international conference for this purpose.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no confirmed reports of extrajudicial killings by government security forces, although there were unconfirmed reports from the Oromiya region. Violent encounters between police and armed opposition groups decreased significantly in 1998.

As the result of a border conflict that began in June, Eritrea and Ethiopia exchanged artillery fire and engaged in air attacks that led to numerous civilian casualties. In June Ethiopian forces bombed the Asmara airport in Eritrea, killing one Eritrean civilian.

In late August and early September, 50 children died in a refugee camp due to a lack of medical treatment (see Section 2.d.). In December police shot and killed a prisoner when he attempted to escape.

An investigation into the 1997 death of teacher Wako Tola while in police custody revealed that he died of kidney disease. There has been no investigation into the 1997 deaths of three men suspected in an OLF attack, but the Government stated that the three men died in a shoot-out with police. The November 1997 arrests of three confessed OLF terrorists for deadly bomb attacks against the Tigray hotel and the Blue Tops restaurant in Addis Ababa and the Mekonnen hotel in Dire Dawa in which several persons were killed were followed by arrests of groups of individuals allegedly involved in planning the attacks. In November 1997, the Federal Police arrested 17 alleged supporters of the OLF. A total of 31 Oromo activists and suspected OLF members were arraigned on various terrorist and weapons' possession charges in December 1997.

In 1997 the Federal High Court in Addis Ababa began the arraignment and prosecution of 5,198 persons formally charged with genocide and other war crimes, including extrajudicial killings, under the previous regime. For example, in January the SPO charged Major Melaku Tefera, former administrator of Gondar province, with genocide and crimes against humanity involving the mass slaughter of 1,000 persons during the 1977-78 Red Terror campaign. A state prosecutor told the court that Melaku "had

killed or ordered the killing of 691 opposition members. He also was charged with "exterminating 411 persons for minor offenses, including theft." Of the 5,198 persons charged, 2,246 were in detention, while the remaining 2,952 were charged in absentia. At year's end, witnesses were being heard and evidence taken in the ongoing trials.

Banditry remained a serious problem in a few parts of the country. Bandits, often heavily armed, killed civilians, police and soldiers during robberies and attempted robberies. Most evidence suggests that their motives were primarily economic.

In June Eritrean forces bombed the Ethiopian town of Mekele and killed 47 civilians, including children. In June and again in November, Eritrean forces fired artillery shells at the Ethiopian town of Adrigat, killing six persons and wounding several others.

b. Disappearance

There were no confirmed reports of disappearances perpetrated by the Government. The Ethiopian Teachers Association claims that five of its members disappeared; however, the claim is difficult to substantiate.

In 1997 the Federal High Court in Addis Ababa began the arraignment and prosecution of 5,198 persons charged with genocide and other war crimes under the previous regime, including the disappearance of 14,209 persons. Of the 5,198 persons charged, 2,246 were in detention, while the remaining 2,952 were charged in absentia. At year's end, witnesses were being heard and evidence taken in the ongoing trials.

Several disappearances during the year were attributed to terrorist organizations. In March the ONLF claimed responsibility for the kidnaping of a foreign tourist, who was held for several days before being released. In June six unknown persons kidnaped employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) who were working in the Ogaden region. They were released in July.

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

The Constitution prohibits the use of torture and mistreatment of prisoners; however, there were numerous credible reports that security officials sometimes beat or mistreated detainees. There were reports that the president of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association, Dr. Taye Woldesemayat, was kept handcuffed in his cell for long periods and denied access to adequate medical care. Tesfaye Deressa and Solomon Nemera of the private newspaper Urjii reportedly were beaten, and there were unconfirmed reports that Nemera also was handcuffed for long periods. Government media published occasional reports of officials who were jailed or dismissed for abuse of authority and violations of human rights. The Government stated that it would improve its human rights record and continued to remove and jail corrupt or abusive officials. The Government enlisted donors to provide additional police training to combat this problem.

Prison overcrowding remains a serious problem. Prisoners often are allocated less than 21.5 square feet of sleeping space in a room that may contain up to 200 persons, and some prisoners must sleep outdoors. Prison food is adequate, but prison conditions are unsanitary and access to medical care is not reliable. Prisoners typically are permitted daily access to prison yards, which often included working farms, mechanics' shops, etc. Visitors are permitted, and many prisoners receive regular deliveries of food and other supplies from family members. Prison letters all must be written in Amharic, making outside contact difficult for non-Amharic speakers; however, this restriction is not enforced. Female prisoners are housed separately from men, and rape does not appear to be a problem.

Approximately 1,200 civilian residents of Eritrean origin and 166 prisoners of war captured in fighting between Ethiopia and Eritrea were housed first at a military camp in Fiche, 2 hours from the capital, and then at Bilate camp, some 6 hours south of Addis Ababa (see Section 1.d.). The Government allowed the ICRC access to the detainees on a regular basis. Once the detainees were moved to the Bilate camp, the Government also permitted foreign diplomatic observers to visit and to speak with the prisoners. While conditions generally were described as Spartan but adequate, an international team of observers that visited Bilate camp in July found that there was not enough food, that many persons slept without blankets or mats, that medical care was rudimentary, and that sanitation was poor. According to international observers, conditions at Bilate improved as the year progressed. There were credible reports that detainees received physical punishment for infractions of camp rules. There was an unverified report from a student who claimed to have been detained at the Fiche camp and stated that abuse of detainees is routine and that detainees are beaten after they talk to ICRC officials. In late August and early September, 50 children died in a refugee camp due to a lack of medical treatment (see Section 2.d.).

The army sometimes used military camps for the temporary detention and interrogation of OLF fighters and alleged OLF supporters. These camps are located near Goba in Bale zone, Oromiya.

The Government permits independent monitoring of prison conditions, military camps, and police stations by the ICRC and sometimes by diplomatic missions. The ICRC had routine access to regional prisons, civilian detention facilities, and police stations throughout the country, although the Government did not grant the ICRC permission to visit federal prisons on a regular basis. The ICRC has restricted access to military detention facilities in eastern Ethiopia, where suspected OLF fighters are held.

There were frequent diplomatic visits to some prominent detainees held by the SPO for alleged war crimes, or for allegedly plotting violent insurrection, including former Derg housing ministry official and governor of Sidamo, Abera Yemane-Ab, 1968 Olympic marathon winner Mamo Wolde, former Addis Ababa University President Dr. Alemayehu Tefera, Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA) secretary general Dr. Taye Woldesemayat, editor-in-chief of Uriji newspaper Tesfaye Deressa, and AAPO founder and personal physician to two former heads of state, Professor Asrat Woldeyes. None of the six reported abuse while in prison, although other prisoners reportedly were beaten. International observers, among them a delegation from the European Parliament, also were granted access to prisoners.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution and both the Criminal and Civil Codes prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, but the Government does not always respect these rights in practice.

Under the Criminal Procedure Code, any person detained must be charged and informed of the charges within 48 hours and, in most cases, be offered release on bail. Those persons believed to have committed serious offenses may be detained for 15 days while police conduct an investigation, and for additional 15-day periods while the investigation continues. Some offenses, such as murder and treason, are not bailable. In practice, and especially in the outlying regions, authorities often detain persons without a warrant, frequently do not charge them within 48 hours, and--if persons are released on bail--never recall them to court. Over 10,000 criminal suspects remained in detention without charge, most of whom were accused of participating in armed actions by the OLF or the ONLF. Often these lengthy detentions are due to the severe shortage, and limited training of judges, prosecutors, and attorneys, as well as to longstanding traditional practices.

Federal and regional authorities arrested and detained more than 1,500 persons without charge or trial for activities allegedly in support of armed opposition groups. The vast majority of these incidents took place in the Oromiya and Somali regional states. In typical cases, security forces arrested and held these persons incommunicado for several days or weeks before eventually releasing them. Observers report that with the decrease of armed actions by opposition groups, incidents of detention have declined, although more than 10,000 persons allegedly associated with armed opposition groups remain in detention. Some 93 OLF fighters arrested in 1994 remain in detention.

From February to April, 34 Oromos were arrested, often without warrants, and held incommunicado. Along with 31 Oromos arrested in November 1997, they were tried in closed sessions for alleged terrorist activities. Their verdicts still were pending at year's end. In April security forces sealed the Oromo Human Rights League's office because of alleged connections with the OLF, confiscated documents, and detained league member and prominent local attorney Bekele Nadi for 2 days of questioning. Bekele Nadi has not been detained subsequently.

Although the OLF is an illegal organization due to its refusal to renounce violence and accept the Constitution, simple membership is not necessarily cause for arrest. OLF members travel abroad without hindrance. However, the Government draws a distinction between the OLF rank-and-file membership and its leadership.

The authorities arrested five journalists and editors associated with the opposition newspaper Urjii in October and November 1997. The arrests of the journalists occurred without warrants, and the detainees were held incommunicado for up to a month. Four of the detainees, after being held for almost 4 months, were charged with involvement in terrorist activities and violating the Press Law. They remained in detention at year's end. One detainee was charged with violating the Press Law, but was released on bail in December (see Section 2.a.). In January the authorities detained four journalists from the influential Amharic private newspaper Tobia and kept them in jail for 6 months. In July authorities detained three journalists of the private weekly Nishan for 2 months (see Section 2.a.).

In September three Ethiopian Teacher's Association executive council members were detained without charge for 2 months (see Section 2.a.). They were subsequently released.

Of the 5,198 persons charged with genocide and other war crimes under the previous regime, some had spent 6 years in pretrial detention (see Sections 1.a. and 1.e.).

In 1997 the SPO removed the parliamentary immunity of two EPRDF Members of Parliament, arrested them, and indicted them for war crimes. The Federal Sports Commissioner was arrested because of his affiliation with the previous regime's "reign of terror." Their trials, as well as the trials of Olympic marathon champion Mamo Wolde and former Addis Ababa University President Alemayehu Tefera, were ongoing at year's end. The trial of Dr. Taye Woldesmayet, ETA president, began in 1997 but was ongoing at year's end. Dr. Woldesmayet was indicted for sedition for alleged involvement in an underground terrorist organization.

Opposition groups allege that some of the persons detained by the SPO, as well as some others, are held for political reasons. The Government denies that it holds persons for political reasons.

Approximately 1,200 civilian residents of Eritrean origin and 85 Eritrean exchange students were detained following the outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea. More than 50 of the students were subsequently released and deported to Eritrea, but over 30 remained in detention at year's end. The Government justified these detentions for reasons of national security. A total of 166 prisoners of war captured in fighting between Ethiopia and Eritrea also were detained.

Exile is illegal, and the Constitution provides that Ethiopian nationals shall not be deprived of their nationality against their will. However, since the outbreak of conflict with Eritrea, the Government had detained and deported thousands of persons with links to Eritrea or of Eritrean origin on national security grounds. The Government asserted that these were not

Ethiopian citizens, and had been involved in actions detrimental to the security of Ethiopia. Moreover, many of these persons had Ethiopian documentation. The Government actions raised serious issues of due process, as there were no preliminary hearings to determine the merits of the deportations, no right to counsel was provided to detainees, and detainees had only a very circumscribed opportunity to register protest. In addition, the issue of the nationality of Eritrean-origin Ethiopians has never been settled since the independence of Eritrea in 1993. Heads of households were taken without warning, detained, and often deported via bus within less than 48 hours, sometimes leaving behind children with no family member to look after them. Remaining family members were given arbitrary deadlines to sell property, and sometimes were subjected to departure taxes based on estimated annual income and unpaid balances on government bank loans. The Government apparently attempted to intimidate persons of Eritrean background. For example, in June the Government executed an Eritrean businessman, Jamil Yasin Mohamed. While Mohamed was convicted of killing Major General Hayelom Araya, the timing of this execution, the first legal execution since 1991, was seen by many as a warning to Eritreans in Ethiopia and a morale booster for the Ethiopian military. Some Ethiopians of Eritrean origin, a number of whom had never even been to Eritrea, attempted to leave Ethiopia by means other than the deportation bus, but routinely were denied exit visas and often had their Ethiopian passports confiscated. There were reports that those deported included elderly persons and children. By year's end, a total of 45,000 Eritreans and Ethiopian citizens of Eritrean origin of an estimated population of up to 400,000 had left Ethiopia for Eritrea; the vast majority were deported, although a small number left the country voluntarily to join family members who were deported (see Section 2.d.).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, it is weak and overburdened. Although the federal and regional courts continued to show signs of judicial independence, in practice severe shortages of adequately trained personnel in many regions, as well as serious financial constraints, combine to deny most citizens the full protections provided for in the Constitution.

Consistent with the Constitution, the Government continued to decentralize and restructure the judiciary along federal lines with the establishment of courts at the zonal (county) and regional (state) levels. The federal High Court and federal Supreme Court adjudicate cases involving federal law, transregional issues, and national security and hear both original and appeal cases. The regional judiciary is increasingly autonomous; with district (Woreda), zonal, high, and supreme courts mirroring the structure of the federal judiciary. The Government has delegated some of the war crimes trials to the supreme courts in the regions where the crimes allegedly were committed.

The Government continued a sweeping overhaul of the military justice system. The Government relies on foreign assistance to train officers and noncommissioned officers in topics including judicial and nonjudicial punishment, human rights, and the conduct of soldiers during military operations.

The Constitution provides that persons arrested have the right to be released on bail. However, in May regional authorities arrested the president and two Supreme Court judges of the Gambella regional Supreme Court for defying a regional government order to deny bail to former regional officials charged with corruption. The judges subsequently were released due to intervention from the Federal Government.

Authorities detained more than 1,500 persons without charge, especially in the Oromiya and Somali regions, for supposed involvement with the OLF and the ONLF, but ultimately released many without an appearance before a judge (see Section 1.d.). Such cases often reflect arbitrary actions on the part of local officials, but also result from an overburdened and cumbersome judicial system marked by a shortage of trained and competent prosecutors and judges.

Regional offices of the federal Ministry of Justice monitor local judicial developments, but the federal judicial presence in the regions is limited. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some local officials interpret decentralization to mean that they no longer are accountable to any higher authority, even within their own regions. For example, there were reports that police officers disregarded decisions of the federal Supreme Court, and instances when police approached several judges until they found one would issue an arrest warrant or remand a case with little or no evidence.

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 acknowledge the pay scale offered must be increased significantly to attract the required numbers of competent professionals. Senior government officials charged with judicial oversight estimate that the creation of a truly independent and skilled judicial apparatus would take decades. The Government has welcomed foreign financial and technical assistance to accelerate this process.

Pending passage by regional legislatures of laws particular to their region, all judges are guided exclusively by the federal

procedural and substantive codes.

According to the Constitution, accused persons have the right to a public trial by an ordinary court of law within a reasonable time after having been charged. Accused persons have the right to be represented by legal counsel of their choice. In practice, however, lengthy pretrial detention is common, closed proceedings occurred, and at times, detainees were allowed little or no contact with their legal counsel. The Public Defender's Office provides legal counsel to indigent defendants, although its scope remains severely limited, especially with respect to SPO trials. The law does not allow the defense access to prosecutorial evidence before the trial.

The Constitution provides legal standing to some preexisting religious and customary courts and gives federal and regional legislatures the authority to recognize other courts. By law, both parties to a dispute must agree before a customary or religious court may hear a case. Shari'a (Islamic) courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims. In addition, some traditional courts still function. Although not sanctioned by law, these courts resolve disputes for the majority of citizens who live in rural areas and who generally have little access to formal judicial systems.

The SPO was established in August 1992 to create an historical record of the abuses during the Mengistu government and to bring to justice those criminally responsible for human rights violations. The Federal High Court has considered the cases of 2,658 defendants accused of genocide, war crimes, and aggravated homicide. Trials began in 1994 and continue; however, the

3-year-long process is subject to frequent and lengthy adjournments. Court-appointed attorneys, sometimes with inadequate skills and experience, represent many of the defendants, following claims that they could not afford an adequate defense. The Government also is trying 2,952 persons in absentia, including the former dictator colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, who is now in exile in Zimbabwe. All the defendants in custody appeared before court in 1998. These cases were still in progress at year's end, and no defendant had been released on bail. Legal observers expect relatively few additional cases to be brought, with many defendants charged and tried collectively in each instance. On September 10, the Government announced the release of 33 SPO defendants for lack of evidence.

On December 27, the Government released AAPO chairman Professor Asrat Woldeyes, who was convicted in 1994 of conspiracy and incitement to violence and sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment, and permitted him to travel abroad for medical treatment. The Federal Prosecutor's Office suspended all pending charges against him. Asrat had been hospitalized for diabetes, vision loss in his right eye, a recurring heart condition, high blood pressure, and hypertension.

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

The law requires judicial search warrants but, in practice, they seldom are obtained outside Addis Ababa.

There were unconfirmed reports that in certain rural areas local officials use threats of land redistribution to enforce support for the ruling coalition.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution and the 1992 Press Law provide for the freedom of speech and of the press; however, the Government used legal and other mechanisms to restrict these rights in practice. The Government continued to prosecute journalists and editors for publishing articles that violated the Press Law, and some journalists practiced self-censorship. Nonetheless, the private press was very active and often published articles extremely critical of the Government.

The Government uses provisions of the Press Law concerning publishing false information, inciting ethnic hatred, and libel to justify the arrest of journalists. The number of journalists detained or imprisoned on any given date fluctuated from 13 to 22; at year's end, 13 journalists remained in detention.

In January the authorities detained four journalists from the influential Amharic private newspaper Tobia and kept them in jail for 6 months. Only one, the editor-in-chief, was charged. The authorities arrested five journalists and editors of the

Oromo-controlled private weekly "Urjii" in October and December 1997 for allegedly abusing their free speech rights. Four

of the detainees, Urjii editors Tesfaye Deressa, Solomon Nemera and Alemu Tolossa and publisher Garomo Bekele, after being held for almost 4 months, were charged with involvement in terrorist activities, and violations of the Press Law. They remained in detention at year's end. One detainee, Urjii Deputy Manager Waqshum Bacha, was charged with violations of the Press Law, but was released on bail in December (see Section 2.a.). Authorities detained three journalists of the private weekly Nishan in July, allegedly for an editorial that cautioned against propaganda against Eritreans. All three were released in September.

However, despite the threat of legal action, the private press still is very active. Many private newspapers continue to publish false information, unsubstantiated stories, and harsh antigovernment articles without any official sanction. The Government has not banned any newspaper or publication. However, the newspapers Ethop, Wenchiff, and Tobia were forced to interrupt their publication because of the arrest of the bulk of their staff.

A major step by the Government in providing access to information was the establishment of the new Office of the Government Spokesperson soon after the conflict with Eritrea broke out in June. The Spokesperson started distributing press releases to the Ethiopian news agency, foreign embassies, foreign news agencies, and other international organizations. The Government continued to bar some private newspapers and news organizations from attending government briefings and press conferences, and most government officials still refuse to meet with private journalists.

Although most private newspapers support the Government regarding the conflict with Eritrea, the private press remains confrontational and continues to report that government forces or regional officials commit human rights abuses. Most private press accounts are unsubstantiated and extremely difficult to verify.

Citizens are generally free to discuss publicly any topic they choose. A number of groups critical of the Government held press conferences and public meetings without retribution. However, authorities disrupted an ETA seminar in August by sealing ETA offices, although the meeting continued unimpeded at another location. On September 17, reportedly acting without a warrant, police ordered ETA acting general secretary Shemelis Zewdie and two executive board members to open sealed offices and surrender documents. When the three refused to cooperate, they were detained for over 2 months.

Because of an 85 percent illiteracy rate and extreme poverty, only about 1 percent of citizens regularly read any newspaper or magazine, and citizens outside Addis Ababa have extremely limited access to the print media. About 34 weekly and 2 fortnightly newspapers appear regularly. Nearly all private newspapers as well as the state newspapers are printed at one of the

state-owned printing presses, but there were no reports of problems printing any newspapers or magazines.

Foreign journalists continued to operate freely and often wrote articles critical of government policies. They or their local affiliates were granted greater access to government officials than were local journalists. In January the Ministry of Information imposed new regulations requiring foreign journalists to apply for visas 2 weeks before travel and requiring work permits and evidence of training for foreign correspondents. In response to criticism, the regulations were rescinded a month later.

While much of the private press continues to lack professionalism in its reporting, some print media are developing into more responsible publications. Others are actually opposition newsletters that often purvey unsubstantiated criticism of the Government. Several are tied to distinct ethnic groups, especially Amhara and Oromo, yet severely criticize the Government for being ethnocentric. Newspapers critical of government leaders and their policies are widely available in the capital, but scarce elsewhere.

Radio remains the most influential medium in reaching those who live in rural areas. The Press Law allows for private radio stations, but the only operating nongovernmental radio stations are Radio Fana, a station controlled by the ruling EPRDF coalition, and the Mekele Voice of Tigray. The Government operates the sole television station. Ownership of private satellite receiving dishes, facsimile machines, and modems is permitted. Internet access is unrestricted, but private satellite transmission uplinks are not allowed.

The official media, including broadcast, wire service, and print media, are legally autonomous and responsible for their own management and partial revenue generation, although they continue to receive government subsidies. Government reporters practice self-censorship but at times have questioned official policies. The Government's press and information department acts as an official spokesperson and implemented a 1996 information policy, which guides contacts among government, the press, and the public.

Academic freedom is respected. In general, however, political activity is not encouraged on university campuses. Despite government assurances that the Addis Ababa University would not be affected by the conflict with Eritrea, the institution dismissed nine Ethiopian academics of Eritrean origin. In addition the authorities detained approximately 82 Eritrean exchange students early in the hostilities; some 30 of the students remained in detention in Bilate on grounds that they had received military training and would be conscripted into the Eritrean army if released.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly; however, while the Government generally permitted groups to assemble, on at least one occasion it interfered with this right. In August authorities disrupted an ETA seminar by sealing the association's offices (see Section 2.a.). Organizers of large public meetings or demonstrations must notify the Government in advance and obtain a permit. Permits appear to be granted routinely.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association and the right to engage in unrestricted peaceful political activity; however, the Government limits this right in practice. The Government changed its procedures for registration of NGO's in 1996, but a number of problems regarding NGO's remain unresolved. The NGO registration process remains slow and tedious, but improved during the year. Many NGO's that had long been unsuccessful in their efforts were registered, including the Action Professionals for the Advancement of People. Primary registration responsibility rests with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), which conducted a public review of draft comprehensive written procedures for NGO registration on September 24. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), which the Government asserts is primarily a political organization, has not been granted registration as an NGO, yet operated freely. The Ethiopian Free Press Journalist's Association also has experienced problems registering as an NGO. Authorities closed the offices of the Oromo Human Rights League (OHRL) in April, on the grounds that that some OHRL board members wished to use the organization as a front for the OLF. Some members of the OHRL were detained and questioned about OLF involvement (see Section 1.d.). Board members denied any connection to the OLF. The OHRL had been operating without a license, but it had fulfilled the prerequisites for licensing and had been waiting for over a year to get a license (see Section 1.d. and 4).

The Government requires political parties to register with the National Election Board (NEB). Parties that do not participate in two consecutive national elections are subject to deregistration. There are about 60 organized political parties. Of these, eight are national parties and the remainder operate only in limited areas.

Opposition Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy (CAFPD) official Dr. Beyene Petros complained that local officials in the Southern Peoples' region blocked CAFPD candidates from registering to compete in December 29, 1997 district elections. Although an investigation by the NEB discounted many of these allegations, the federal Government began a series of constitutional awareness conferences for local officials. The opposition AAPO is registered with the NEB yet its activists often complain that the Government restricts their ability to campaign for popular support.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the right of conversion; although the Government generally respects this right in practice, on occasion local authorities disrupted religious services. There have been instances of conflict among religious groups, most noticeably between Orthodox Christians, Pentecostals, and Evangelicals. In most interreligious disputes, the Government maintains neutrality and tries to be an impartial arbitrator. However, in February, despite generally good relations with the Government, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that regional officials in Tigray disrupted religious services, which they termed illegal meetings, and arrested and briefly detained some 50 believers. Authorities in Tigray also sought to prevent Jehovah's Witnesses from proselytizing. The Government decided that Jehovah's Witnesses of Eritrean origin, who might face religious persecution in Eritrea, were not to be subject to deportation. Unlike in past years, there were no complaints by Pentecostals and Evangelicals that the police failed to protect them adequately during instances of interreligious conflict.

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of movement, including the right of domestic and foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation; however, the Government restricted these rights in practice. In principle, citizens can and do freely change their residence or workplace. However, after the outbreak of the border conflict with Eritrea, Eritreans and Ethiopian citizens of Eritrean-origin were subjected to detention and deportation to Eritrea. By year's end, a total of 45,000 such persons of an estimated population of up to 400,000 had left Ethiopia for Eritrea; the vast majority were deported, although a small number left the country voluntarily to join family members who were deported (see Section 1.f). Passports of Eritrean-origin Ethiopian citizens routinely were confiscated. The Government stated that it took these actions in response to security

concerns.

The law requires citizens and residents to obtain an exit visa before departing the country. However, in the case of Eritrean-origin Ethiopian citizens who feared deportation, exit visas were extremely difficult to obtain after the outbreak of the border conflict with Eritrea.

The Government of Israel opened an office in Gondar to assist approximately 3,000 Falashas (Ethiopian Jews) from the Quara area near the Sudan border who were in the process of immigrating to Israel. Over 8,000 Feles Mora (Ethiopians who claim that their ancestors were converted forcibly from Judaism to Christianity) have also expressed an interest in immigration to Israel. Such cases are handled under provisions of Israeli law pertaining to family reunification.

As a result of the border dispute with Eritrea, more than 188,000 persons were forced to flee their homes in northern Ethiopia. The Government has presented relief and rehabilitation proposals for these internally displaced persons to bilateral donors and NGO's. From late July to early August, ethnic conflict in the south-center of the country displaced approximately 160,000 persons, but they were resettled in their homes when the situation improved later in the year (see Section 5).

The law includes provisions for the granting of refugee or asylee status in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government treats asylum seekers fairly and cooperates with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and returning citizens. There were no reports of the forced expulsion of individuals having a valid claim to refugee status; however, early in the year there was a major roundup of Sudanese refugees residing in urban areas. Before they were moved to refugee camps along the Sudanese border, the refugees were detained temporarily under sometimes overcrowded conditions, which in one instance provoked unrest in a detention facility resulting in a death. In late August and early September, 50 children died in a refugee camp due to diarrheal disease and lack of medical treatment. Measures were taken in early November to improve medical care at the facility.

Ethiopia, in cooperation with the UNHCR, continues to provide first asylum to approximately 270,000 refugees, mostly from Sudan and Somalia. There are up to 8,000 Djiboutian Afar asylum seekers in the country, but they have not been granted refugee status. Negotiations began in 1997 between the Government and the UNHCR concerning their status and were ongoing at year's end.

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

Citizens exercised the right to vote for a national government for the first time in 1995. However, most opposition groups chose to boycott the elections, although opposition participation was widely believed to be possible. Boycotting parties claimed that the Government impeded their ability to participate in the political process. Concerted efforts by foreign governments to promote dialog and political reconciliation between the Government and several key opposition groups leading up to the elections were not successful. Nevertheless, observers organized by foreign donor governments, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and a coalition of domestic NGO's judged the elections to be generally free and fair, although they cited numerous irregularities. The boycott was one factor that led to an overwhelming victory by candidates of the better-funded and better-organized EPRDF over candidates of the relatively weak and poorly organized opposition parties and independent candidates. By-elections were held in mid-June with minimal opposition participation. Several opposition parties, including the Oromo National Congress, successfully registered with the National Electoral Board.

Political participation remains closed to a number of organizations that have not renounced violence and do not accept the Government as a legitimate authority. These groups include Medhin, the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, the Oromo Liberation Front, some elements of the Ogaden National Liberation Front, and several smaller Somali groups.

Neither law nor practice restricts the participation of women or minorities in politics. While women's status and political participation are greater than ever, women are represented minimally in the Council of Ministers and among the leadership of all political organizations. Only 1 of the 15 members of the Council of Ministers is a woman; 2 other women hold ministerial rank; and a number of others hold senior positions. There are only 13 women among the 545 members of the lower House of Peoples' Representatives; in the upper house, the House of Federation, 7 of 108 members are women, including the speaker. Among the 23 judges on the federal High Court, 6 are women, and there are 2 women on the Supreme Court.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Human rights organizations include the Ethiopian Human Rights and Peace Center, the Ethiopian Congress for Democracy, the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association, the Ethiopian Human Rights League, the Inter-Africa Group, and Hundee. These groups are engaged primarily in civic and human rights education, legal assistance, and trial monitoring. During a national conference in December, female journalists formed the Ethiopian Women's Media Association, which seeks to promote women and women's issues in the media. With foreign assistance, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions began a program of democracy and human rights education. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council, a

self-proclaimed human rights monitoring organization, continues to operate without legal status as an NGO because the Government considers some of its activities as primarily political. The Government closed the OHRL in April, alleging that it was a front for the OLF (see Sections 1.d. and 2.b.).

The ICRC conducts regular visits to detention centers throughout the country (see Section 1.c.). In August the ICRC began to escort Eritrean-origin deportees during their walk across "no man's land," the distance from the deportation bus stops at the Ethiopia border into Eritrea. The Government also invited the ICRC, foreign diplomats, and international NGO's to visit centers where detained Eritreans were gathered prior to deportation, and permitted diplomats to visit Eritrean-origin detainees in Bilate prison camp.

Delegations from Human Rights Watch/Africa, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Rapporteurs Sans Frontieres, Amnesty International, Education International, the Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights, and various international labor organizations visited during the year. Representatives from these organizations held substantive discussions with a number of senior government officials, including Prime Minister Meles. The Government continues to encourage international human rights groups and foreign diplomats to observe the war crimes trials that began in 1994.

The Government hosted an international conference on the establishment of a human rights commission and office of ombudsman on May 18-22, and participants included a number of prominent international human rights advocates. The conference represented a step towards the implementation of the constitutional requirement to establish a human rights commission and office of the ombudsman and an attempt to bolster human rights awareness among government officials and the general public. Opposition parties and domestic and international human rights organizations did not participate, in some instances because they were not invited, but they were expected to participate in the next phase of the process.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution states that all persons are equal before the law. The law provides that all persons should have equal and effective protection without discrimination on grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status. However, the Government has not yet put fully into place mechanisms for the effective enforcement of these protections.

Women

Culturally based abuses, including wife beating and marital rape, are pervasive social problems. While women have recourse to the police and the courts, societal norms and limited infrastructure inhibit many women from seeking legal redress, especially in remote areas. Social practices obstruct investigations into rape and the prosecution of the rapist, and many women are not aware of their rights under the law.

The Constitution provides for the equality of women; however, these provisions are often not applied in practice. Although women played a prominent role (including service in combat) during the civil war, in practice women do not enjoy equal status with men. The law considers men and women as equal, but tradition and cultural factors place the husband as head of the household. All land belongs to the State. However, land reforms enacted in March 1997 stipulate that women may obtain government leases to land. Discrimination is most acute in rural areas, where 85 percent of the population lives. In urban areas, women have fewer employment opportunities than men do, and the jobs available do not provide equal pay for equal work. To further enhance the status of women, the Government formally adopted a National Program of Action in 1997. The program seeks to expand educational and work opportunities for women, improve women's access to health care, and educate women about certain unhealthy traditional practices such as early marriage.

Children

The Government has encouraged the efforts of domestic and international NGO's that focus on children's social, health and legal issues. However, the Government has limited ability to support efforts to provide improved health care and basic

education. Despite efforts by the Government to increase the number of schools, there are not enough schools to accommodate the country's youth, and less than 30 percent of children actually attend school; many do so in shifts.

The societal abuse of young girls continues to be a serious problem. The great majority of girls undergo some form of female genital mutilation (FGM), which is widely condemned by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health. Reports place the percentage of women and girls who have undergone FGM at between 73 and 90 percent. Clitorectomies typically are performed 7 days after birth, and the excision of the labia. Infibulation, the most extreme and dangerous form of FGM, is performed at any time between the age of 8 and the onset of puberty. The law does not specifically prohibit FGM, although it is officially discouraged, and the Government has been very supportive of the National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia, which is dedicated to eradicating FGM. The Government also is working to discourage the practice of FGM through education in public schools. In September Orthodox and Muslim leaders criticized publicly the practice of FGM.

The Constitution defines the age of consent as 15 for females and 18 for males. Nevertheless, early childhood marriage is common in rural areas, with girls as young as age 9 being party to arranged marriages. Especially in the Afar region of eastern Ethiopia, young girls continue to be married to much older men, but this traditional practice is coming under greater scrutiny and criticism. The maternal mortality rate is extremely high, due in part to food taboos for pregnant women, poverty, early marriage, and birth complications related to FGM, especially infibulation.

There are thousand of street children living in Addis Ababa. These children beg, sometimes as part of a gang, or work in the informal sector in order to survive (see Section 6.d.). Government and privately run orphanages are unable to handle the number of street children, and older children often abuse younger children. Due to severe resource and financial constraints, abandoned infants often are overlooked or neglected at hospitals and orphanages. There are credible reports that children are occasionally maimed or blinded by their "handlers" in order to raise their earnings from begging.

Child prostitution continues to be a problem. There were many press reports of the large-scale employment of children, especially underage girls, as hotel workers, barmaids, and prostitutes in resort towns and truckstops south of Addis Ababa. According to the head of the Labor and Social Affairs Office of East Shoa zone, children are being bought or stolen from the countryside by "child vendors" and sold to bar and liquor store owners in Shashemene and Nazareth. The going price for a child is reportedly about \$36. Young girls are working as dancers, barmaids, and prostitutes in the town of Shashemene. There are also credible reports that poor rural families sell their young teenage daughters to hotel and bar owners on the main truck routes. Social workers note that these girls are prized because their clients believe that they are free of sexually transmitted diseases. The unwanted babies of these young girls usually are abandoned at hospitals, police stations, welfare clinics, and adoption agencies. Some families send their unemployed,

out-of-school, underage daughters to work in Middle Eastern countries as house servants and nannies, some of whom are kept in sexual bondage (see also Section 6.c. and 6.d.).

People With Disabilities

The Constitution stipulates that the State shall allocate resources to provide rehabilitation and assistance to the physically and mentally disabled. However, limited government resources restrict action in these areas. The Amhara Development Association operates a project to provide vocational training to disabled war veterans in Bahir Dar. The Tigray Development Association has established a similar center in Mekele. The Government has not yet put into place mechanisms to enforce a 1994 law mandating equal rights for the disabled. The Government does not mandate access to buildings or government services for persons with disabilities, and people with minor disabilities sometimes complain of job discrimination. An official at the Government's Rehabilitation Agency estimated that, partly as a result of the long civil war, there are more than 5 million disabled persons in the population.

Religious Minorities

Despite the country's broad level of religious freedom and tolerance for established faiths, there have been instances of open conflict among the religious groups, most noticeably between Orthodox Christians and Pentecostals. Although there were no reported instances of physical conflict among religious groups during the year, there continued to be interreligious tension and criticism. In most sections of the country, Orthodox Christians and Muslims participate in each other's religious observances and there is a level of tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas, most notably in Welo. Longstanding Evangelical Protestant denominations, particularly the Lutheran Mekane Yesus church, provide social services such as health care and education to nonmembers as well as members. However, newer faiths encounter problems. Jehovah's

Witnesses and Pentecostals sometimes have encountered overt opposition from the public. Early in the year Jehovah's Witnesses encountered difficulties in holding meetings and proselytizing in a handful of communities in the highly Orthodox Christian region of Tigray, where local officials arrested some members of Jehovah's Witnesses and warned them not to hold prayer sessions. On two occasions in 1997, Orthodox Christians disrupted Pentecostal revivals in Debre Zeit and Arba Minch, apparently incited by Orthodox clergy. Orthodox members inflicted injuries and destroyed property before police intervened to restore order. While some Pentecostals have complained in the past that the police did not do enough to protect them, most observers assert that the Government strictly enforces the constitutional right to freedom of religion, and that the police strive to maintain impartiality in all interreligious disputes. Muslims and Orthodox Christians complain about proselytization by Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses. Muslims complain that some Pentecostal preachers disparage Islam in their sermons.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There are more than 80 ethnic groups. Although many of these groups have influenced the political and cultural life of the country, Amharas and Tigrayans from the northern highlands have played a dominant role. Some ethnic groups such as the Oromos, the largest single group, were subjugated during the 19th century. In an attempt to address ethnic concerns, the Government has established a federal system with political boundaries drawn roughly along major ethnic lines. With federalism, for example, citizens of the Oromiya region now have greater say over their own affairs and resources. Primary school students are taught in their local languages, consistent with the Constitution.

Ethnic conflicts erupted in some remote areas. There were reports of conflict between the Nuer and the Anuak in Gambella region. Near the border between the Oromo and Southern Peoples' regions, the July 22 murder of a ruling coalition official touched off interethnic fighting between the Gudji Oromos and the Geddeo in villages around Hagare Mariam. According to credible sources, 22 of the 88 kebeles (municipalities) in the Hagare Mariam district were damaged badly. Fleeing villagers were housed temporarily in schools or village halls. In September the Government began repatriating an estimated 160,000 displaced persons to the villages from which they had fled, and all had reportedly returned by year's end.

The military services continued their efforts to recruit ethnic minorities at all levels. All new recruits are screened as potential officer candidates, and those who qualify are offered officer training. Seven of the military's nine generals are

non-Tigrayans.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

Only a small percentage of the population is involved in wage labor employment, which is largely concentrated in urban areas. Approximately 85 percent of the work force live in the countryside and are engaged in subsistence farming.

The Constitution and the Labor Law provide most workers with the right to form and join unions and engage in collective bargaining, but only about 300,000 workers are unionized. In general, employees of the civil and security services (where most wage earners are found), judges, and prosecutors are not allowed to form unions. Workers who provide an "essential service" are not allowed to strike. Essential services include a large number of categories such as air transport, railways, bus service, police and fire services, post and telecommunications, banks, and pharmacies.

There is no requirement that unions belong to the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU), which was established in 1993, decertified in December 1994 because of internal management and political disputes, and officially reestablished and recertified in 1997. CETU includes eight federations organized by industrial and service sector rather than by region.

CETU complained that members of the Government's privatization authority believed that labor did not have to be consulted regarding the potential effects on the work force caused by parastatal privatization or sales. In April a faction aligned with the Government tried to form a new industrial federation of banking and insurance trade unions with new leadership, but it was unable to gather support for replacing the present federation.

The Labor Law stipulates that a trade organization may not act in an overtly political manner. The Labor Law explicitly gives workers the right to strike to protect their interests, but it also sets forth restrictive procedures that apply before a legal strike may take place. These apply equally to an employer's right to lock out workers. Strikes must be supported by a majority of the workers affected. The Labor Law prohibits retribution against strikers. Both sides must make efforts at conciliation,

provide at least 10 days' notice to the Government, include the reasons for the action, and in cases already before a court or labor board, the party must provide at least a 30-day warning. If an agreement between unions and management cannot be reached, the Minister of Labor may refer the case to arbitration by a Labor Relations Board (LRB). The Government has established LRB's at the national level and in some regions. The Minister of Labor and Social Affairs appoints each LRB chairman, and the four board members include two each from trade unions and employer groups. Some efforts to enforce these regulations are made within the formal industrial sector. There were no strikes during the year.

Independent unions and those belonging to CETU are free to affiliate with and participate in international labor bodies.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Collective bargaining is protected under the Labor Law and under the Constitution, and it is practiced freely throughout the country. Collective bargaining agreements concluded between 1975 and the promulgation of the 1993 Labor Law are covered under the 1975 Labor Code and remain in force. Labor experts estimate that more than 90 percent of unionized workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements. Wages are negotiated at the plant level. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination by employers against union members and organizers. There are grievance procedures for hearings on allegations of discrimination brought by individuals or unions. Employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination are required to reinstate workers fired for union activities.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution proscribes slavery, which was officially abolished in 1942, and involuntary servitude. The Criminal Code specifically prohibits forced labor, but it can be used by court order as a punitive measure. The Criminal Code does not apply to children age 15 or younger. Forced or compulsory labor by children is illegal. There were no reports of slavery within Ethiopia; however, thousands of young girls were reportedly sold into forced prostitution (see Section 5). There also were numerous anecdotal accounts of young persons, especially girls, being sent by their families into involuntary servitude in the Middle East to work as house servants and nannies, some of whom are kept in sexual bondage. There is reportedly a network of sex smugglers based in the tourism and import-export sectors who are heavily involved in soliciting potential clients, recruiting young girls, arranging travel, and fabricating counterfeit work permits, travel documents, and birth certificates (see Sections 5 and 6.d.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

Under the Labor Law, the minimum age for wage or salary employment is 14 years; special provisions cover children between the ages of 14 and 18 years, including the prohibition of night work or hazardous work. Forced or compulsory labor by children is illegal. However there are reports that children are sent into involuntary servitude abroad, and that children are stolen from the countryside, sold to bar and liquor store owners, and forced to work as prostitutes (see Sections 5 and 6.c.). Children may not work more than 7 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. While authorities make some efforts to enforce these regulations within the formal industrial sector, social welfare activists, civic organizers, government officials, and entrepreneurs agree that child labor is pervasive throughout the country, especially in the informal sector. Large numbers of children of all ages tend animals and work in fields outside most government regulatory control in the countryside, or work as street peddlers and beggars in the cities. The Government disputes the existence of child labor.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no minimum wage in the private sector. However, since 1985 a minimum wage has been set and paid to public sector employees, by far the largest group of wage earners. This public sector minimum wage is about \$25 (175 birr) per month, which is insufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. According to the Office of the Study of Wages and Other Remuneration, a family of five requires a monthly income of \$61 (439 birr).

The legal workweek, as stipulated in the Labor Law, is 48 hours, consisting of 6 days of 8 hours each, with a 24-hour rest period. However, in practice, most employees work a 40-hour workweek, consisting of 5 days of 8 hours each.

The Government, industry, and unions negotiate to set occupational health and safety standards. However, the Inspection Department of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs enforces these standards ineffectively, due to a lack of human and

financial resources. Workers have the right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without jeopardy to continued employment.

[end of document]



[Return](#) to 1998 Human Rights Practices report home page.

[Return](#) to DOSFAN home page.

This is an [official U.S. Government source](#) for information on the WWW. Inclusion of non-U.S. Government links does not imply endorsement of contents.