Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: ETH32853
Country: Ethiopia
Date: 15 February 2008

Keywords: Ethiopia – United Arab Emirates – Orthodox Christians – Ethiopian Orthodox Church – Patriarch Paulos – Muslim Converts

This response was prepared by the Research & Information Services Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. This research response may not, under any circumstance, be cited in a decision or any other document. Anyone wishing to use this information may only cite the primary source material contained herein.

Questions

1. What evidence is there of the operations of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the UAE?
2. Is there any material which confirms a split in the church in 2005 in UAE related to continued support for Patriarch Paulos?
3. Is there any evidence of harm to those who have ceased to support Patriarch Paulos in recent years in Ethiopia?
4. Is there any evidence that those who have converted Muslims in Ethiopia have been the subject of harm in Ethiopia in recent years?

RESPONSE

Research Background

On 21 January 2008, several individuals and groups were contacted for information to assist in answering these research questions:

- Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Debreselam Medhanealem Church – Abu Dhabi
  - dsmabudhabi@yahoo.com
  - abatesfa@hotmail.com
  - eotcuae2001@yahoo.co.uk
  - msmabudhabi@yahoo.com
  - eotcwebm@yahoo.co.uk
  - webmaster@ethiopianorthodox.org
  - msmabudhabi@yahoo.com

(RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Debreselam Medhanealem Church – Abu Dhabi, 'Information Request about Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)', 21 January – Attachment 1).

A reply was received from the webmaster of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church website [eotcwebm@yahoo.co.uk] on 15 February, and the information provided in this reply is included in the following response (Webmaster 2007, 'Re: Information Request about Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) [Scanned]', 15 February – Attachment 2).

Topic Background

In 1991 a coalition of rebel forces, called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), seized power from the Communist government of Mengistu Haile Mariam and established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). Under the new government, Patriarch Abune Merkorios, head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (also known as the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo [or Tewahido] Church), abdicated and fled abroad, announcing in exile that his abdication had been made under duress, and that he was still the acting Patriarch in exile. In 1992 Patriarch Abune Paulos (also referred to at times as Abune Gebremedhin) was established as the new head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. Patriarch Abune Paulos is of the same Tigrean ethnicity as the leadership of the EPRDF, and since coming to power has vocally supported the EPRDF, both factors of which have led to criticisms of his rule over the Church, as explored below. Because of the link between Patriarch Abune Paulos and the EPRDF, opponents of the EPRDF regime have also expressed vocal opposition to Patriarch Abune Paulos, and there has been a split in the followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (especially amongst followers living outside of Ethiopia) between supporters of Patriarch Abune Paulos and supporters of Patriarch Abune Merkorios (U.S. Department of State 1994, *Ethiopia Human Rights Practices*, January http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1993_hrp_report/93hrp_report_africa/Ethiopia.html – Accessed 18 January 2008 – Attachment 3; Goldman, A. L. 1992, 'U.S. Branch Leaves Ethiopian Orthodox Church', *The New York Times*, 22 September http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E0CE1DB143FF931A1575AC0A964958260 – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 4; 'Aba Paulos: The Rejected Patriarch' 2006, Debteraw website, 15 January http://www.debteraw.com/Article%20-%20aba_diblos.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 5).

1. What evidence is there of the operations of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the UAE?

Sources suggest that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a relatively small presence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Debreselam Medhanealem Church operates in Abu Dhabi and provides information about their operations on their website:

> The Debreselam Medhanealem Church was established in the year 1995 by the initiatives of One Deacon and few followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Their love and devotion for the religion has helped all followers of the Church to worship God with their own language, custom and belief. Some of the important steps taken soon after the first congregation were as follows:
>
> - On 25th April 1995 the first Parish council (Sebeka Gubae) was formed.
> - On August 1996 DSMC members registration started by the committee.

- Sunday School sub committee was formed and the first 10 members (five men & five women) were registered.

- On Dec 1997 Christmas celebration the Sunday school choir members consisting of five men & five women presented their programs for the first time.

At present, We have One priest, nine deacons and one hundred registered Sunday school members who regularly provide sacramental and other services to the community.

Since DSMC doesn't have its own church, the first arrangement for place of worship was made with the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox brothers that lasted for nearly 18 month (till August 1996).As the congregation grew bigger, it became difficult to accommodate all in a relatively small Egyptian Coptic Orthodox church. Hence, The church made a new arrangement with the Greek Orthodox Church to use their tabernacle.

Ever since most of the religious services has been taking place at the Greek Orthodox church except for few religious celebrations held at the adjacent St. Andrew's church. **Today, more than 3000 people, of whom 2000 are registered and tithing members. Most of them attend regular Friday prayer (Friday is the weekend in this region). The number swells a bit more when we welcome our brothers & sisters from near by cities of Dubai, Sharjah (Sahalite Meheret Kidist Mariam) & Al Ain (Debere Bisrat Kidus Gebriael) on special religious celebrations like Christmas & Easter.**

During the past 11 years the DSMC congregation have had many opportunity to receive blessings and life changing education from a number of eminent fathers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

The DSMC has been trying to share its blessings by reaching out to our brothers & sisters in the region and made a positive contribution in strengthening the congregations in Al Ain (Bisrate Gebriel), Bahrain (Kidane Meheret) and Qatar (Kidist Selasse).

Our ardent desire for the immediate future is to house Debereselam Medhanealem in our own church that is befitting an Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, reflecting our rich history and culture.

Our church will always be grateful to our brothers in the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox church, The Greek Orthodox Church and The Saint Andrew's Church for their understanding of our plight and extending their uninterrupted support through out these years ('Our Brief History' (Undated), Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Debreselam Medhanealem Church – Abu Dhabi website http://dsmedhanealem.org/About%20Us.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 6).

As outlined in the source above, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has struggled to find a place for congregation and has shared sites with the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church in years past.

The webmaster of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church website (http://ethiopianorthodox.org/english/indexenglish.html) has provided information on the Church in the United Arab Emirates:

1. How large is the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)? Approximately how many members are there, and are there churches throughout the country, or is the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Debreselam Medhanealem Church in Abu Dhabi the only active Church in the UAE?

> **Reasonable sizes of a fellow of Ethiopian Orthodox Church live in the UAE. Many attend the regular service but the number fluctuates and can not provide precise figure. The average attendance is about 150. Currently, Medhanealem is only one Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the UAE.** (Webmaster 2007, 'Re: Information Request about Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) [Scanned]', 15 February – Attachment 2).

Beyond this, no other information could be found in the searches conducted on the operations of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the UAE.

2. Is there any material which confirms a split in the church in 2005 in UAE related to continued support for Patriarch Paulos?

The webmaster of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church website has provided information on the 2005 church split in the United Arab Emirates:

> 2. Was there a split in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the UAE in 2005? Do you have any information on this?
>
> **Yes, there was an attempt to split from the head of the church Abba Paulos back then and still there is a great division. There are people still would like to set up their own church which disassociate itself from the head of the church in Ethiopia. However, the situation is not easy for those live in that country and might not come to materialize in the near future. As a result there aren't many registered members compare to the size of the congregation.**
>
> 3. Are there followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the UAE who no longer support Patriarch Abune Paulos?
>
> **Yes there is a great unsatisfaction about the head of the church in Ethiopia. Despite people are unhappy about being under the patriarch in Addis Ababa, they still attend the service as there is no alternative** (Webmaster 2007, 'Re: Information Request about Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) [Scanned]', 15 February – Attachment 2).

Beyond this, no other information could be found in the searches conducted on a split in the church in the UAE.

3. Is there any evidence of harm to those who have ceased to support Patriarch Paulos in recent years in Ethiopia?

An RRT Research Response from September 2007 provides some relevant background to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (RRT Research and Information Services 2007, *Research Response ETH32366*, 26 September – Attachment 7). In addition, sources within this response comment on the treatment of followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church for failing to adhere to the government's and Patriarch Abune Paulos' instructions. This includes a 2002 report from the Ethiopian Human Rights Council:

> **Members of the Federal Special Police Force have on November 18/2002, severely beaten up and highly inconvenienced the clergy and monks who were rendering**

spiritual services as well as the laity and Sunday School students who had congregated in the sacred pre-cincts of Mahdere Sibhat Holy Lideta Mariam and Debre Medhanit Medhanealem Church. Many people have been clobbered and received light and serious physical injuries as a result of the forceful action that was taken by members of the Federal special police force. On that very date, many people were rounded up in the church's premises, crammed in trucks and whisked off to Wereda 22 Police Station. According to EHRCO's findings, the cause of the conflict is based on the feud that had flared up between the officials of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on the one hand and the church's clergy, the laity and Sunday school students on the other. The misunderstanding that had surfaced between them could not be resolved in the course of time. Nor could it be resolved through the traditional church method of resolving conflicts. So the case was brought before the court where the two parties mentioned above have been arguing their cases. **Finally, the court gave a decision on the case to the effect that the former head of the church and members of the Diocese council should hand over the church's property to the new church head who has been appointed by the Addis Ababa Head Office of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.** Members of Wereda 22 police, representatives of the Ethiopian Orthodox church, the former head of the church, the newly appointed head of the church, members of the Diocese Council had gathered on November 18/2002 to execute the court's decision. On that day, the laity had congregated beginning from 6:00 a.m. and were saying prayers.

The handing over process started at about 9:00 a.m. and proceeded smoothly until 4:30 p.m. At about 4:30 p.m., the Special Security police force had, for unknown reasons, cordoned off the street stretching from Mexico Square to Lideta Church and the street stretching from the High Court to the Lideta Church. At about 5:00 p.m. more than 100 helmeted police, with shields, clubs and carrying rifles started to make their way into the church's pre-cincts. The laity voiced their protest peacefully by singing and shouting asking the armed men to vacate the pre-cinct. In addition they said, they would not accept the newly appointed church head and were not willing to hand over the church. They prevented the law enforcement agents from coming closer to the church by holding their hands together. At that moment, members of the special police force seiged the area and, and brutally and continually clubbed monks, elderly people, children, women and Sunday school youths. After identifying and beating up the youths who were preaching the Gospel, the police herded them together at one spot crammed them into a truck and shipped them off to Wereda 22 Police Station. Police have also inflicted similar harm on the residents of the area, who were outside the church compound protesting against police brutalization of the laity.

At about 7:00 p.m., members of the special police force took measures to disperse the crowd in the area. As has been indicated below, one person was shot and killed as a result of the police offensives. **Police have shot and killed thirty-year old Sintayehu Taddesse in violation of Article 15 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia which stipulates "Every person has the right to life. No person may be deprived of his life except as a punishment for a serious criminal offence determined by law" and Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which the FDRE government has accepted.** Sintayehu Taddesse who was 30 years old, was a resident of woreda 4, kebele 38, House No. 040. Sentayehu was hit on his right side by a bullet shot by police near the gate of the Federal High Court while walking along the road that takes to Merkato. Members of the Federal police immediately picked up Sintayehu, put him on their own car and rushed him to Tikur Anbessa Hospital where he died. The police took his body to Menelik Hospital and dumped it in the mortuary ('Illegal Acts committed against the clergy and laity of Lideta Church' 2002, Ethiopian Human Rights Council, 57th Special Report http://www.ehrco.org/Reports/special57.pdf – Accessed 18 January 2008 – Attachment 8).

A 2003 report from IRIN News.org also observed:

> **Ethiopia's federal police have beaten up clergymen and tortured religious demonstrators, the country's human rights watchdog claimed on Thursday**.
>
> The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) said the assaults occurred after clashes between police and demonstrators at Addis Ababa's Lideta Mariam Orthodox church on 26 December.
>
> The clashes were sparked by a dispute between the Church of Lideta Mariam and the Addis Ababa Diocese. **The community has been resisting attempts by the office of the Patriarch to appoint a church administrator** ('Clergymen, demonstrators reportedly beaten up by police' 2003, *IRIN News.org*, 23 January – Attachment 9).

Similarly, a 2003 report from the Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners noted:

> Hundreds of people detained by the police for staging a peaceful demonstration at the Lideta Mariam church in Addis Abeba were taken to a police detention center outside of the city and tortured for days. **The demonstration by priests and believers was caused by the arbitrary decision of the contested patriarch of the Tewahido Church of Ethiopia, Abune Paulos, to put his own choice as the administrator of the Lideta Mariam church.**
>
> **The detained were not brought before a court of law and witnesses have confirmed that may of them bore the physical signs of physical mistreatment. Actually, torturing prisoners is wide spread in the jails, prisons and detention centers of the EPRDF. In the central prison in Addis Abeba (the Kerchiele), risoners are beaten up routinely. In the secret prisons of the EPRDF, where political dissidents are held in dark rooms with their legs chained to the walls, torture is also common. In the past, photos of torture victims have been published by the newspapers and no denial has been made by the EPRDF**. As a guerrilla group, the ruling EPRDF was condemned for its torture of peasants and errant combatants ('PRDF police torture dozens of detained priests and civilians' 2003, Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners website, 16 January http://www.socepp.de/january_21.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 10).

Sources seem to suggest that complaints and protests against Patriarch Paulos are often linked to complaints and protests against the government. In May 2004 the Shabait website reported:

> Three Ethiopian religious leaders came to Eritrea **rejecting the pressures the TPLF [Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, dominant party in the ruling coalition, EPRDF, that was responsible for appointing Patriarch Abune Paulos] regime is imposing to disseminate political campaigns via the Ethiopian Orthodox church**.
>
> **Melake-Tsehay [honorific] Aba Gebremedhin Meselu, Melake-Hiwet [honorific] Aba Ghebregziabher Tayo and Deacon Teshome Ghetahun, the three defectors disclosed that the TPLF regime is using the Orthodox church in the country to promote its political ambitions**. Accordingly, the priests indicated that the regime has passed an ordered to the church to indict the Oromo liberation front and other resistance movements as terrorists.
>
> Administrator of the St Michael Church in the Baco area, Aba Gebremedhin, an intellectual in theology, indicated that the church began protesting right after the TPLF regime ordered the church to indict the Oromo Liberation Front as a terrorist movement in the country ('Three Ethiopian priests defect to Eritrea citing Government pressure' 2004, Shabait website, 2 May – Attachment 11).

More recently, a January 2006 report on the Ethiomedia website noted:

> **Addis Ababa: Police shot and killed two individuals and wounded others who were part of an Orthodox Christian congregation that was escorting a Tabot (holy slab) from Sidist Kilo to St George's Church as part of the Ethiopian Epiphany, a source said Thursday [19 January].**
>
> **"The gathering was chanting and marching toward St George's Church while the priests were carrying the Tabots (replicas of the Arc of Covenant) when police opened fire. Most of them were singing spiritual songs. Some were shouting Leba! Leba! (The thief!) in denunciation of Abune Paulos, a controversial patriarch of the Orthodox Church.**
>
> **"Police arrived and fired shots into the crowd of spiritual singers, killing two and wounding many," the source said**. The killings took place at the 5th gate of the Sidist Kilo Campus of Addis Ababa University, when the entourage was proceeding past Yekatit 12 Hospital on the way to St George's Church about a mile away.
>
> The holy occasion was turned into another tragedy day in Addis.
>
> **Fifteen years in power and defeated at the polls, Ethiopia's ruthless tyrant Meles Zenawi entirely depends on his security gangs to hang onto power** ('Police reportedly kill two at religious congregation' 2006, *Ethiomedia*, 19 January – Attachment 12).

A 2006 report from the Debteraw website, an anti-EPRDF site compiled by Ethiopians living in London, also commented on the links between Patriarch Paulos and the government:

> The congregation of the Debre Tsion Kidist Mariam Church in London, UK has passed unanimous resolution today not to recognize Aba Paulos as the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. We will post the full statement made by the congregation tomorrow.
>
> **We are also receiving reports from various sources that members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church throughout the U.S., Canada, and other parts of the world are going to issue similar statements and are going to call for the dethroning of Abune Paulos on the grounds that he is openly taking side with the ruling party rather than pursuing a more politically neutral role and he is accused of tarnishing the image of the church. It is a very well known fact that his appointment was rejected as unlawful and ethnically motivated.**
>
> …**Abune Paulos' vocal support for the EPRDF regime has alienated many of the government's opponents who criticize him for taking political sides. The fact that the Patriarch is of the same Tigrean ethnicity as the dominant group in the EPRDF government has left him open to accusation of ethnocentrism and xenophobia as well as nepotism at all levels of church administration.** The government is often accused of having engineered the rise of Abune Paulos to the Patriarchate out of the same ethnocentrism and his long term underground membership of the TPLF. Patriarch Abune Paulos has repeatedly made public statements supporting the EPRDF government, alienating many of the faithful who believed that as head of the Church he should have pursued a more politically neutral role. Opposition politicians have been critical of his partisanism ('Aba Paulos: The Rejected Patriarch' 2006, Debteraw website, 15 January http://www.debteraw.com/Article%20-%20aba_diblos.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 5).

In contrast to the above reports, the 2006 *International Religious Freedom Report* for Ethiopia noted:

> **The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right.**
>
> There was little change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, although some Protestant and Muslim groups continued to complain that local officials discriminated against them when seeking land for churches, mosques, and cemeteries.
>
> **The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society continued to contribute to religious freedom. In general, there was a slight increase in interreligious conflict and clashes.** Government criticism of some Muslim elements continued. There was reported tension between traditionalist Muslims and followers of the Wahhabi sect, an interpretation of Islam that reportedly receives support from Saudi Arabia (U.S. Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 13).

Similarly, the 2007 *International Religious Freedom Report* for Ethiopia noted:

> In most interreligious disputes, the Government maintained neutrality and tried to be an impartial arbitrator. Some religious leaders requested the establishment of a federal institution to deal with religious groups; however, no action was taken to establish such a federal institution by the end of the period covered by this report (U.S. Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 14).

The two *International Religious Freedom Reports* cited above to not provide any evidence to suggest that those who ceased to support Patriarch Abune Paulos in Ethiopia have been subject to mistreatment (U.S. Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 14; U.S. Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 13). A 2007 *Amnesty International Report* briefly reviewed cases of 'Torture and ill-treatment' in Ethiopia during the year, but none of these were linked with people who have ceased to support Patriarch Abune Paulos (Amnesty International 2007, *Amnesty International Report – Ethiopia*, May, section 'Torture and ill-treatment' – Attachment 15).

4. Is there any evidence that those who have converted Muslims in Ethiopia have been the subject of harm in Ethiopia in recent years?

It should be noted that some of the following sources regarding the treatment of Muslim converts are published by Christian sources with a special interest in conversions, and for this reason care should be exercised when deciding what reliance to place on the content in connection with review decision making.

Little information could be found in the searches conducted on those who were directly responsible for converting Muslims. Reports tend to comment on the converts themselves, and the communities to which they belong. Given this, there is a wide body of material available on those who have converted, and this is explored below.

A recent report in *The Observer* provides an outline on why Muslim converts may be harmed:

> **Some Islamic texts brand Muslims who convert to other faiths as 'apostates' and call for them to be punished**. Seven of the world's 57 Islamic states – including Iran – impose the death penalty for conversion (Doward, J. 2007, 'Bishop warns that Muslims who convert risk being killed', *The Observer*, 16 September http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,2170160,00.html – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 16)

Beyond this, there is a wide body of literature on the treatment of Muslim converts, or 'non-Muslims', around the world (the term 'non-Muslims' is often used to refer specifically to those who have converted away from Islam. A more common term is 'apostate' or 'kafir', but these can be regarded as pejorative terms). A paper by Abul Ala Mawdudi presents an argument that outlines the reasons under Islamic law for harming Muslim converts:

> **To everyone acquainted with Islamic law it is no secret that according to Islam the punishment for a Muslim who turns to kufr (infidelity, blasphemy) is execution**. Doubt about this matter first arose among Muslims during the final portion of the nineteenth century as a result of speculation. Otherwise, for the full twelve centuries prior to that time the total Muslim community remained unanimous about it. The whole of our religious literature clearly testifies that ambiguity about the matter of the apostate's execution never existed among Muslims. The expositions of the Prophet, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (Khulafa'-i Rashidun), the great Companions (Sahaba) of the Prophet, their Followers (Tabi'un), the leaders among the mujtahids and, following them, the doctors of the shari'ah of every century are available on record. **All these collectively will assure you that from the time of the Prophet to the present day one injunction only has been continuously and uninterruptedly operative and that no room whatever remains to suggest that perhaps the punishment of the apostate is not execution** (Mawdudi, A. A. 1994, *The Punishment of the Apostate According to Islamic Law*, Answering Islam website http://www.answering-islam.org/Hahn/Mawdudi/index.htm#I – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 17)

With specific reference to Ethiopia, there are conflicting reports regarding the treatment of Muslim converts. Several sources comment on the mistreatment of Muslim converts, particularly those converting to Christianity, whilst other sources suggest that relations have been 'respectful' and 'tolerant'. These reports are explored below (for comments on 'respectful and tolerant' relations see U.S. Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 14).

The Christian Post, an American website dedicated to Christian news, reported in 2005 on an attack against a Muslim convert in Ethiopia:

> **VOM also learned that, on the same day, in Alaba, Hajji Husman Mohamed and his family were severely beaten, including his pregnant wife. For more than an hour, the attackers physically abused everyone in the house, VOM wrote. Hajji, a former Muslim Imam, has reportedly suffered several times since his conversion to Christ in March 2003. Last December, all of his property was taken from him, including his furniture, cattle, and a year's supply of grain** (Chan, K. 2005, 'VOM Documents Sever Persecution in Rural Ethiopia', *The Christian Post*, 9 February http://www.christianpost.com/article/20050209/15478.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 18).

Whilst the Ethiopian government does not impose the death penalty, sources suggest that in rural areas of Ethiopia Islamic Shari'ah courts may hold legal jurisdiction and sit in judgment of cases involving predominantly-Muslim communities. In these areas some Muslim converts have been harmed in recent years:

Sources say the Ethiopian Constitution has allowed a certain degree of flexibility in administering justice given the remote nature of much of Ethiopia. It provides, for example, legal standing to some pre-existing religious and customary courts and gives federal and regional legislatures the authority to recognize other courts. By law, all parties to a dispute must agree before a customary or religious court may hear a case. Shari'ah courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims. In addition, other traditional systems of justice, such as councils of elders, continue to function in the country. Although not sanctioned by law, these traditional courts typically resolve disputes for the majority of citizens who lived in rural areas and who generally have little access to formal judicial systems. "Unfortunately, this also opens up the system to abuse, such as is being seen in the region near Alaba," VOM reported.

According to VOM, the Alaba self-governing administration is the first regional office in Ethiopia to have requested the government to implement Shari'ah law. Ninety-nine percent of the population in Alaba is Muslim, with less than one percent being Ethiopian Orthodox. The tiny fraction remaining is Evangelical. Islam is the identity of the Alaba tribe. As one church leader put it to VOM sources, in this town, "Islam means Alaba and Alaba means Islam." (Chan, K. 2005, 'VOM Documents Sever Persecution in Rural Ethiopia', *The Christian Post*, 9 February http://www.christianpost.com/article/20050209/15478.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 18).

Similarly, a 2006 report from *Christian Newswire* noted:

In 2005, two prominent Muslims in Henno converted to Christianity: "H," a well known Muslim leader, and "M," the son of a well-respected Muslim tribal leader. The two conversions angered Muslim leaders in the surrounding region. On July 20, 2006, "M" hosted a worship service for the other Christians in Henno and invited a choir from the Sidama region.

The worship service gained the attention of the whole village, including Muslim leaders who responded violently by instigating a riot, using gangs in the area. The gangs were carrying local weapons such as knives, stones, and metal rods.

The Muslim leaders demanded the expulsion of the choir from the area. The new believer and former Muslim leader, "H," refused to stop the service despite their pressure. Consequently, the crowd began to beat "H" and other Christians in the house with their weapons.

"H" was beaten badly, receiving five deep wounds to his head. Because he was beaten with an iron rod, he was also missing teeth. He suffered deep lacerations to his legs, where several ligaments protruded from the skin. "H's" daughter-in-law was pregnant at the time but lost her baby because she was also severely beaten.

In total, twelve people were seriously injured; five others were found to have lacerations on their body and received medical treatment in Shashamene Kuyera Hospital. "H" also received care and has recovered from the attack.

The Christians reported the riot to the district government administrative office, which took no legal action. Instead, the officers warned Christians not to worship in a region that is predominately Muslim. It is important to note that all officers who heard the case were in fact Muslim. The case was then taken to a higher police authority. The police responded by arresting 26 gang members. However, they were released quickly because tribal elders appealed to the government ('Muslims Attack Christians In Henno, Ethiopia' 2006, *Christian Newswire*, 19 October

http://ahmedsalib.wordpress.com/2006/10/19/muslims-attack-christians-in-henno-ethiopia/ – Accessed 21 January 2008 – Attachment 19).

Several reports from the persecution.org website comment on attacks against Muslim converts to Christianity. The most recent being from 31 October 2007:

> **The radical Muslims are infuriated due to large number of conversion of Muslims to Christianity and are reacting violently as seen recently in Buyo locality in Jimma.** The locality is found in Seka province which is 15 Km away from Jimma town. Nearly two hundred converts from Islam to Christianity live in the village where 95 % of its residents are Muslims.
>
> The violence began on the 14th Oct, 2007 in midnight when the Muslim extremists set a fire to Mr. T's house. Then Mr. T fled to Jimma town to report to the government officials about the incident. The next day, another house was burnt down. This house was the place that used to serve the Christians as their gathering place and it belonged to the missionary named Mr X.
>
> **As the Christians in this place were newly converted from the Islam, the radical Muslims were threatening them for the last two weeks saying like, "You can't live here being Christians; we are going to prove it to you very soon"**
>
> Then again fives house were set on fire although they were not completely burned down as some people came out and put it off. Yet the houses became out of use as they were damaged severely. Some other houses were also broken into and totally 13 families became homeless and all the Christians, nearly 200, in this village became victims of this violence in one or the other ways. Then 25 people who were targeted in a special way fled to Jimma town and the brethren in Jimma town are providing them with food, shelter and clothing.
>
> **Although the Seka province government officials were aware of this violence, they kept quiet until the federal police from Jimma town interfered and commanded them to take actions. It has to be known that the officials in Seka themselves are Muslims and sided with the perpetrators. That is why the victims had to come and report to the federal police when they could have gone to the Seka town Police.**
>
> Pressured by the federal police, government officials in Seka town put 13 of the perpetrators in Jail for only one day and released them without taking their case to the court. They held three days meeting with the residents and tried to settle things unfairly. They spoke to the people about religious freedom in Ethiopian constitution and promised the Christian minority that they would be given a plot of land where they can build their church.
>
> In spite of the official's advices and meetings with the people, the Muslim extremists again burned down one house after a week and continued threatening the Christians. The Muslim extremists have continued to perpetrate such acts because there have not been any measures taken against them for their past actions. Mr Y, one of the victims said, "The perpetrators are even getting ready to take a worse action against us provided that the opportunity avails itself."
>
> It was not only their houses but also their properties were severely damaged. Coffee trees, Avocado trees, Mango trees, banana trees and some other trees that have been the main sources of income were cut down. It takes at least 3 -4 years to get back them in place. This means the Christians have to rely on aid for long time ('Radical Muslims Attack Christians in South West Ethiopia' 2007, Persecution.org website, 31 October http://www.persecution.org/suffering/ICCnews/newsdetail.php?newscode=6344&title=radical-muslims-attack-christians-in-south-west-ethiopia – Accessed 22 January 2008 – Attachment 20).

Another persecution.org website report from April 2006 noted:

> Orthodox church officials allegedly also encouraged attacks against the church where a popular nightclub singer, Meseret Negusse, became a 'born again' Christian, accepting Jesus Christ as her personal Savior and Lord, VOMC said.
>
> **…Following the singer's "conversion" to evangelical Christianity, she often brought new converts with her during Sunday worship services, the Full Gospel Church said in a published statement. "Meseret made us extremely busy in the Kingdom work by bringing new converts who need deliverance and follow up."**
>
> **… Since last year at least one evangelist, 34-year old Estifanos Abate, of the Assemblies of God church in the town of Jijiga was shot and killed for refusing to deny his faith in Christ, human rights watchers said. VOMC said earlier that young people who convert from Islam to Christianity have been expelled from their homes and forced to live on the streets or work as house servants** ('Terrified Ethiopian Christian Women in Besieged Evangelical Church' 2006, Persecution.org website, 13 April http://www.persecution.org/suffering/newsdetail.php?newscode=2599 – Accessed 22 January 2008 – Attachment 21).

Similarly, another report from persecution.org, also from April 2006, noted:

> The incidents, which took place on March 21 and 22, left three churches burned and damaged the World Vision field office. Several believers fled their homes to escape the threat of violence.
>
> In the first, a large Muslim mob orchestrated an attack on Christians in Kemisse approximately 350 km north-east of Addis Ababa. Businesses owned by Christians were vandalized and several Christians were injured.
>
> **The second incident was more severe. Nesero Abraraw was on duty as a guard of a Lutheran church in Arisi Negellie, 225 km south of Addis. Voice of the Martyrs Canada sources say he was shot three times by an unidentified assailant. A Muslim convert to Christianity and father of seven, he died at the scene** ('Christians Targeted for Attack' 2006, Persecution.org website, 3 April http://www.persecution.org/suffering/newsdetail.php?newscode=2529 – Accessed 22 January 2008 – Attachment 22).

These sources seem to suggest that if an individual lives in an area where Muslims are subject to Shari'ah law, and where Ethiopian legal and police authority is low, then they may be at risk of harm by converting.

The most recent *International Religious Freedom Report* on Ethiopia provides a broad overview of relations between religious groups:

> Tensions between Muslim and Christian communities resulted in localized violent episodes on several occasions. Additionally, there was reported tension between the traditional Sufi Muslim majority and Salafi/Wahhabi Muslims who derived support from foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)
>
> **… In most regions, Orthodox Christians and Muslims generally respected each other's religious observances, and there was tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas. Most urban areas reflected a mixture of all religious groups. However, during the reporting period, a series of violent interfaith conflicts in the western part of the country threatened historic tolerance and stability.**

> … In response to the violent clashes between Muslim and Orthodox religious groups in late 2006 in the western part of the country that were referenced in Section II, Restrictions on Religious Freedom, the federal and regional governments significantly increased the presence of government security forces. Additionally, the government replaced or transferred many local government leaders in the areas where the violence occurred, due to reports that some leaders had failed to prevent an escalation in local religious tensions. As a result, tensions had subsided at the end of the reporting period (U.S. Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 14).

The previous *International Religious Freedom Report* also makes similar comments:

> **In most regions, Orthodox Christians and Muslims generally respected each other's religious observances, and there was tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas.** In Addis Ababa, persons of different faiths lived side-by-side. Most urban areas reflected a mixture of all religious faiths. The Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Protestant denominations provided social services such as health care and education to nonmembers as well as to members in local religious tensions. As a result, tensions had subsided at the end of the reporting period (U.S. Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 13).

As noted in the above response to question 3, the 2006 and 2007 *International Religious Freedom Report* for Ethiopia noted that religious freedom was generally respected in most regions. The 2006 and 2007 *International Religious Freedom Reports* do not provide any evidence to directly suggest that those who converted from Islam were subject to mistreatment, merely that "urban areas" displayed "respect" and "tolerance", whilst there were undefined "violent clashes" in other areas. Likewise, none of the sources consulted make any direct mention of the individuals responsible for conversions, and thus it is difficult to determine if they have also been subject to mistreatment. A 2007 *Amnesty International Report* briefly reviewed cases of "Torture and ill-treatment" in Ethiopia during the year, but none of these were linked with people who converted from Islam (U.S. Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 14; U.S. Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September Attachment 13; Amnesty International 2007, *Amnesty International Report – Ethiopia*, May, section 'Torture and ill-treatment' – Attachment 15).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:
Google http://www.google.com.au/
All the web http://www.alltheweb.com/
Altavista http://www.altavista.com/
Ask http://www.ask.com/?ax=5
Exalead http://www.exalead.com/search
Yahoo! http://search.yahoo.com/

Government Information & Reports
Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada http://www.irb.gc.ca/
UK Home Office http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk
US Department of State http://www.state.gov/
Non-Government Organisations
Amnesty International website http://www.amnesty.org/
Human Rights Watch http://www.hrw.org/

International News & Politics
BBC News *http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/index.shtml*

Databases:
BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)
REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)
ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)
RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. RRT Research & Information 2008, Email to Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Debreselam Medhanealem Church – Abu Dhabi, 'Information Request about Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)', 21 January.

2. Webmaster 2007, 'Re: Information Request about Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) [Scanned]', 15 February.

3. U.S. Department of State 1994, *Ethiopia Human Rights Practices*, January http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1993_hrp_report/93hrp_report_africa/Ethiopia.html – Accessed 18 January 2008.

4. Goldman, A. L. 1992, 'U.S. Branch Leaves Ethiopian Orthodox Church', *The New York Times*, 22 September http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E0CE1DB143FF931A1575AC0A964958260 – Accessed 21 January 2008.

5. 'Aba Paulos: The Rejected Patriarch' 2006, Debteraw website, 15 January http://www.debteraw.com/Article%20-%20aba_diblos.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008.

6. 'Our Brief History' (Undated), Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Debreselam Medhanealem Church – Abu Dhabi website http://dsmedhanealem.org/About%20Us.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008.

7. RRT Research and Information Services 2007, *Research Response ETH32366*, 26 September.

8. 'Illegal Acts committed against the clergy and laity of Lideta Church' 2002, Ethiopian Human Rights Council, 57th Special Report http://www.ehrco.org/Reports/special57.pdf – Accessed 18 January 2008.

9. 'Clergymen, demonstrators reportedly beaten up by police' 2003, *IRIN News.org*, 23 January. (CISNET 'Ethiopia' CX73076)

10. 'PRDF police torture dozens of detained priests and civilians' 2003, Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners website, 16 January http://www.socepp.de/january_21.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008.

11. ‘Three Ethiopian priests defect to Eritrea citing Government pressure’ 2004, Shabait website, 2 May. (CISNET ‘Ethiopia’ CX94885)

12. ‘Police reportedly kill two at religious congregation’ 2006, *Ethiomedia*, 19 January. (CISNET ‘Ethiopia’ CX145120)

13. U.S. Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September.

14. U.S. Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report – Ethiopia*, September.

15. Amnesty International 2007, *Amnesty International Report – Ethiopia*, May, section ‘Torture and ill-treatment’.

16. Doward, J. 2007, ‘Bishop warns that Muslims who convert risk being killed’, *The Observer*, 16 September http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,2170160,00.html – Accessed 21 January 2008.

17. Mawdudi, A. A. 1994, *The Punishment of the Apostate According to Islamic Law*, Answering Islam website http://www.answering-islam.org/Hahn/Mawdudi/index.htm#I – Accessed 21 January 2008.

18. Chan, K. 2005, ‘VOM Documents Sever Persecution in Rural Ethiopia’, *The Christian Post*, 9 February http://www.christianpost.com/article/20050209/15478.htm – Accessed 21 January 2008.

19. ‘Muslims Attack Christians In Henno, Ethiopia’ 2006, *Christian Newswire*, 19 October http://ahmedsalib.wordpress.com/2006/10/19/muslims-attack-christians-in-henno-ethiopia/ – Accessed 21 January 2008.

20. ‘Radical Muslims Attack Christians in South West Ethiopia’ 2007, Persecution.org website, 31 October http://www.persecution.org/suffering/ICCnews/newsdetail.php?newscode=6344&title=radical-muslims-attack-christians-in-south-west-ethiopia – Accessed 22 January 2008.

21. ‘Terrified Ethiopian Christian Women in Besieged Evangelical Church’ 2006, Persecution.org website, 13 April http://www.persecution.org/suffering/newsdetail.php?newscode=2599 – Accessed 22 January 2008.

22. ‘Christians Targeted for Attack’ 2006, Persecution.org website, 3 April http://www.persecution.org/suffering/newsdetail.php?newscode=2529 – Accessed 22 January 2008.