Migration Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA

MRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: ETH35186
Country: Ethiopia
Date: 23 July 2009

Keywords: Ethiopia – Issuance of birth certificates

Question

1. Please provide any information on the issuance of birth certificates in Ethiopia from around late 1980s or so?

MRT *Research Response ETH34802* of 4 May 2009 provides detailed information on the issuance of birth certificates in Ethiopia, including links to previous relevant research responses (MRT Research and Information 2009, *Research Response ETH34802*, 4 May – Attachment 1). From these previous responses, that information which is most relevant to the case presently under consideration is separately cited and discussed below.

In 2002, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC) provided the following information regarding procedures and documentary requirements in Ethiopia for obtaining a birth certificate, and noted that "the birth certificate may be issued by the municipality where the person presently resides rather than where the birth actually took place":

> Regarding birth certificates, the U.S. Bureau of Consular Affairs provides the following information:
>
> [Birth certificates are] available only to those resident in Ethiopia. Requests for copies of previously issued birth certificates should be addressed to the Office of Region 14 Administration, Vital Statistics Service, Municipality of Addis Ababa, P.O. Box 356, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; or to the equivalent office or any other municipality in which the birth was registered.
>
> For children under ten years of age, a hospital birth certificate, court document confirming parentage, or a baptismal certificate and acknowledgement from one's kebele... are sufficient documentation for [the] issuance of a birth certificate. For children between the ages of eleven and thirteen, the above mentioned documents and school records are required for issuance. Any of the above documents and an identity card are satisfactory for the issuance of birth certificates for persons over the age of eighteen.
>
> Persons applying for original birth certificates should contact the appropriate municipal authorities and present hospital birth records, which have been authenticated by their kebele. Because of the nature of the kebele system, the birth certificate may be issued by the municipality where the person presently resides rather than where the birth actually took place (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2002, *ETH39603.E – Ethiopia: The process by which Ethiopian citizens can obtain identity documents from consulates or missions abroad;*

birth registration practices and manner by which birth certificates are issued, 1 October – Attachment 2).

Similar information from the US Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs is provided in the current 'Ethiopia Reciprocity Schedule' (US Department of State (undated), *Ethiopia Reciprocity Schedule* http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/reciprocity/reciprocity_3559.html – Accessed 21 July 2009 – Attachment 3).

A 2005 conference paper prepared by Assefa Bequele, Executive Director of the African Child Policy Forum, quotes from Ethiopia's report to the forum. Ethiopia's country report referred to the practice of certificates being issued by churches, hospitals and municipalities without any requirement for the birth to have been formally registered. The report observed that "the certification process is exposed to falsification", but also observed that "most people do not know their birth date and therefore calculate their age on the basis of unreliable oral information":

> What is happening, ostensibly as a replacement for birth registration, is the practice of birth certificates being issued by churches, hospitals and municipalities. None of these organisations consider birth registration to be a prerequisite for issuing certificates. While churches and hospitals may consult baptismal records and delivery notes to issue birth certificates, municipalities rarely require more than some form of identity paper from another source. In all cases, the certification process is exposed to falsification of age, identity of the person and their parents, and birthplace.
>
> The absence of birth registration and incontestable certificates has resulted in the violation of children's rights to name and nationality... and the personal rights of orphans and other vulnerable children. Institutions regularly encounter problems accessing reliable data quickly, at national and local levels, due to the absence of data generated by a birth registration system. Community level informants have also felt the effects, as most people do not know their birth date and therefore calculate their age on the basis of unreliable oral information (Bequele, A. 2005, 'Universal Birth Registration: The Challenge in Africa – A paper prepared for the Second Eastern and Southern Africa Conference on Universal Birth Registration Mombasa, Kenya, September 26-30, 2005', The African Child Policy Forum website, p.18 http://www.africanchildforum.org/Documents/Universal%20Birth%20Registration_final.pdf – Accessed 9 May 2007 – Attachment 4).

In December 2007, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) advised the RRT that "[i]t is important to note that it is not possible to verify an Ethiopian birth or death certificate accurately by comparison". DFAT provided a sample birth certificate which had been verified as genuine but which nonetheless included different spellings of the place name and was described as exhibiting "no security features other than very poor quality wet stamps". In response to a query specifically about death certificates, DFAT stated that "the format varies widely between towns" and that birth and death certificates from the same town will often have similar formats. DFAT advised that:

> The RRT enquired if the Australian High Commission in Nairobi held an example death certificate from Mekele, Ethiopia. While Post does hold various sample death certificates from Ethiopia, unfortunately they have no examples from Mekele, and the format varies widely between towns. Post does hold a Mekele birth certificate which has been verified as genuine (please find attached with personal identifiers blacked out for privacy reasons). Often (but not always) birth and death certificates from the same towns have similar formats. The document is A4 size on thick smooth paper.

> It is important to note that it is not possible to verify an Ethiopian birth or death certificate accurately by comparison. Use of stolen blanks is common. Bribery of officials is possible - this would usually result in the issue of a genuine certificate containing false information and can only be detected because it is not included in the official register, or there is no file for the person held by the registrar. Please note from the attached document that there are no security features other than very poor quality wet stamps. Mekele is spelt differently in different places on the certificate, and the overall quality is poor, making it very easy to produce counterfeits (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 750 – Ethiopia: RRT Information Request: ETH32733*, 28 December – Attachment 5).

The edited example of a Mekele-issued birth certificate provided by DFAT is somewhat similar in format to the birth certificate issued by the City Council of Fugnian Birra in the case presently before the Tribunal (Mekele Birth Certificate 2006, Genuine Sample – Attachment 6).

Information provided by the US Department of State's Consular Affairs Bureau regarding registrations of births, deaths and marriages in Ethiopia indicates that documentation of births is "relatively new and largely confined to urban areas". It also indicates that "all certificates are available in Amharic, English, or English-Amharic combinations":

> Civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths is not automatic in Ethiopia. The documentation of these events is relatively new and largely confined to urban areas. A church-issued document, an acknowledgment from one's "kebele", and affidavits from three witnesses, all of which can be had for a price, are sufficient evidence for issuance of certificates. Relationships are rarely investigated for veracity. With the exception of divorce decrees, all certificates are available in Amharic, English, or English-Amharic combinations (US Department of State (undated), *Ethiopia Reciprocity Schedule* http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/reciprocity/reciprocity_3559.html – Accessed 21 July 2009 – Attachment 3).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Non-Government Organisations

UNHCR Refworld website http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/

ReliefWeb website http://www.reliefweb.int/

Region Specific Links

Ethiopian Legal Information website http://www.law.ugent.be/pub/nwr/elw/index.html

The African Child Policy Forum website http://www.africanchildforum.org

Search Engines

Copernic http://www.copernic.com/

Databases:

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. RRT Research and Information 2009, *Research Response ETH34802*, 4 May.

2. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2002, *ETH39603.E – Ethiopia: The process by which Ethiopian citizens can obtain identity documents from consulates or missions abroad; birth registration practices and manner by which birth certificates are issued*, 1 October. (REFINFO)

3. US Department of State (undated), *Ethiopia Reciprocity Schedule* http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/reciprocity/reciprocity_3559.html – Accessed 21 July 2009.

4. Bequele, A. 2005, 'Universal Birth Registration: The Challenge in Africa – A paper prepared for the Second Eastern and Southern Africa Conference on Universal Birth Registration Mombasa, Kenya, September 26-30, 2005', The African Child Policy Forum website http://www.africanchildforum.org/Documents/Universal%20Birth%20Registration_final.pdf – Accessed 9 May 2007.

5. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 750 – Ethiopia: RRT Information Request: ETH32733*, 28 December.

6. Mekele Birth Certificate 2006, Genuine Sample.