

Djibouti

Response to Information Request Number:	DJI01001.ZLA
Date:	July 20, 2001
Subject:	Djibouti: Information on Oromo Refugees and Immigrants
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Djibouti / Deportation / Displaced persons / Ethnic minorities / Forced removals / Forced migration / Human rights violations / Illegal immigration

Query:

Are ethnic Oromo individuals in Djibouti likely to face deportation to Ethiopia or to suffer human rights abuses?

Response:

According to the chair of the Oromia Support Group (OSG), an estimated 20,000 Oromo people are presently living in Djibouti (OSG 19 July 2001). Prior to January 2001, the deportation of Oromos was a common occurrence as "The Djibouti government reported that it regularly rounded up and deported as many as 1,000 undocumented Ethiopian immigrants each month. UNHCR interceded to gain the release of registered refugees occasionally detained in the deportation sweeps" (USCR 2001). Security forces cooperating with requests from Ethiopian personnel organize these round-ups (OSG 19 July 2001). Although declared by the Djibouti government to be undocumented, many of these refugees have been registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for years (OSG Feb. 2000). Amnesty International reports that, "In several round-ups of illegal aliens in the capital, hundreds of Ethiopians were arrested and tortured and ill-treated. Women were reportedly raped in police custody" (AI 2000). Police in Djibouti have also detained high profile members of the Oromo community. In one incident, "Ibrahim Mohamed Osman, chair of the Ethiopian Oromo refugee community was arrested in May for alleged links with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which was fighting the Ethiopian government. He remained detained without charge or trial throughout the year" (AI 2000). According to the Oromia Support Group, "In the city of Djibouti, Oromo property is reportedly being confiscated and handed over to the Ethiopian government. The Oromo Refugee Committee wrote in December, that because of lack of access to UNHCR, thousands of Oromo refugees are 'wandering here and there, lacking reception centre protection and assistance, and facing gross refoulement back to Ethiopia" (OSG Feb. 2000).

Summarizing the deportation of Oromos from Djibouti, the chair of the Oromia Support Group states:

"At least one was refouled in 1997, eight in January 1998, and twenty (all UNHCR registered) in December 1999. On 21/22 December 2000, five thousand Oromo refugees were rounded up and transported in closed train carriages to Ethiopia. 28 were killed in transit (by suffocation in the carriages or by shooting when trying to escape the carriages). 127, at least, were known to UNHCR and had attestation papers . . . We heard from Djibouti in March/April [2001] that Oromo refugees were no longer subject to frequent harassment by the police and no longer in danger of refoulement. Conditions for refugees are still appalling there, however, in terms of employment opportunities and lack of

assistance" (OSG 19 July 2001).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

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