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Ethiopia: The treatment of ethnic Amharas and the treatment of members, leaders, and activists of the All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) (2002 - 2006)

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Ethnic Amharas

Amharas are described as one of the most influential ethnic groups in terms of political and cultural life in Ethiopia (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2004, Sec.5), and represent approximately thirty per cent of the overall Ethiopian population (*Countries of the World and Their Leaders Yearbook 2006* 2005, 642).

Land disputes in 2001 in the Oromiya region (i.e., where thousands of ethnic Amharas had been "forcibly resettled" after the country's famine in 1984) led to violence between ethnic Amharas and Oromos (USCRI 2002). According to the U.S. Committee on Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), the clash between the two groups resulted in the displacement of over 10,000 persons, the majority Amharas (ibid.).

A 2004 Writenet report states that many Amharas believe that they have been "negatively" portrayed by the Ethiopian government as "historically responsible for many of Ethiopia's ills" (Jan. 2004, 17).

No further information on the treatment of ethnic Amharas from 2002 to 2006 could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP)

The All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) was formerly known as the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO) (*Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006* Dec. 2005, 381; *Europa World Yearbook 2005* 2005, 1654).

Established in 1991, the AAPO was created to "defend the rights of the Amhara people" (*Political Parties of the World 2005* 2005, 206). According to a 2004 Writenet report, the "ethnically-based" party was

"caught between capitalizing on ethnic frustration at what many see as the negative portrayal by the government of the Amhara elite as historically responsible for many of Ethiopia's ills, and the resentment many Amhara [felt] towards the introduction of ethnicity as a rival Ethiopian nationalism" (Jan. 2004, 17).

In 2002, the party changed its name to the All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) in order to resolve this issue (ibid.) and to reach out to "all Ethiopians" (*Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006* Dec. 2005, 381). In 2005, the AEUP was led by Hailu Shawel (ibid.; *Europa World Yearbook 2005* 2005, 1654).

In 2004, the AEUP merged with the Ethiopian Democratic League (EDL), the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party -Medhin (EDUP-M), and the Rainbow Alliance/Movement for Democracy and Social Justice in order to form the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) (AI Apr. 29 2005, 3). The AEUP's leader, Hailu Shawel, is the leader of this coalition (BBC 29 Dec. 2005; RFI 2 Nov. 2005).

The Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), along with the Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) coalition, make up the country's main opposition (AI 29 Apr. 2005, 3; BBC 17 Dec. 2005; AFP 26 Sept. 2005). Since the country's last elections in May 2005 (HRW Nov. 2005; EU 17 May 2005), the CUD holds 109 of the 546 seats in the House of People's Representatives (Ethiopia 13 Dec. 2005) and is considered Ethiopia's largest opposition group (BBC 5 July 2005; *The Ethiopian Reporter* 10 Dec. 2005).

The ethnicity of the members, leaders, and activists of the AEUP, as well as the CUD, was not identified among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. Since the AEUP changed its name from the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO) in 2002 (Writenet Jan. 2004, 17), its mandate has been to reach out to "all Ethiopians" (*Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006* Dec. 2005, 381); consequently, the members, leaders and activists of the AEUP are not necessarily of Amharic ethnicity.

Treatment of Members, Leaders, and Activists of the AEUP

Numerous cases of "intimidation" and "violence" against the opposition, including the AEUP, have been reported (HRW 13 Jan. 2006; AI 29 Apr. 2005, 9; *Country Reports 2005* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1.a), ranging "from public insults of opposition party members by local officials at civic events, to bombings, house burnings, property confiscation, and murder" (ibid., sec. 3).

There have been reports in 2004 and 2005 of members, supporters, and leaders of the AEUP and CUD being kidnapped (AP 8 Feb. 2005), attacked, and killed by members of Ethiopia's ruling party (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2004, Sec.1.a; AP 8 Feb. 2005). In April 2004, two hundred alleged members of the AEUP were arrested and "harassed"; periods of incarceration for those arrested ranged from seven to thirty days (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2004, Sec.1.d).

There were several reports of government militia (ibid., Sec. 1.c) and *kebele* militia (AI 29 April 2005) assaulting AEUP supporters, while "[l]ocal officials often turned a blind eye to these attacks or were complicit in them" (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2004, Sec.1.c). From December 2003 to May 2004, government militia and soldiers allegedly killed eleven supporters of the AEUP (ibid., Sec.1.a.). In February 2005, five members of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) were killed and 22 were wounded after being attacked by members of the ruling party (AP 8 Feb. 2005).

According to a 2005 Associated Press report, seventeen members of the CUD have also been "imprisoned or kidnapped by the government and their whereabouts are unknown" (ibid.).

Prior to Ethiopia's May 2005 elections, there were various reports of "harassment" (AFP 16 Apr. 2005; ibid. 14 Apr. 2005) and "intimidation" of opposition members (EU 17 May 2005; AI 29 Apr. 2005). The CUD reported that nine of its members had been "harassed" and arrested in the Hadiya Zone (i.e., 360 km South of Addis Ababa) over the period of 26 March 2005 to mid-April 2005 (AFP 16 Apr. 2005). Eight other members of the coalition were arrested in the north of the country in April 2005 after being accused of inciting violence (AFP 14 Apr. 2005). A spokesperson for the CUD claimed that the accusations against the arrested members were part of the ruling party's strategy to [translation] "steal" the elections (ibid.).

Amnesty International reported that a number of opposition parties, including the AEUP and CUD, experienced "restrictions on their [political] activities" leading up to the elections: "candidates and members have been intimidated or suffered human rights violations on account of their peaceful and lawful political activities" (29 Apr. 2005).

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) for the May 2005 elections also reported incidences of "intimidation" of opposition members, including the CUD, prior to and during the elections (EU 17 May 2005, 4). The following were some of the issues surrounding the election as highlighted by the EOM:

"The use of administrative obstacles to gatherings or rallies of the opposition by some local authorities"; "Intimidation of political opponents by public officials"; ... "Disruption of rallies of opposition parties by militia and people allegedly related to the EPRDF [i.e., the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, Ethiopia's ruling party]; with shots fired and people beaten"; ... "Detention, often for short time, of opposition activists on several grounds, usually related to campaign activities; ... Several hundreds of opposition supporters arrested or missing"; ... "Several young political activists from the opposition have been killed ... [including a] CUD member" (ibid.).

There was also allegedly expulsion and "harass[ment]" of observers at polling stations (ibid., 7).

Following the May 2005 elections, opposition members and supporters accused the government of "massive vote rigging" (HRW Nov. 2005), which resulted in a boycott of Parliament by opposition members (ibid.; *The Ethiopian Herald* 21 Sept. 2005) as well as protests by opposition supporters (HRW Nov. 2005; BBC 2 Nov. 2005; RFI 2 Nov. 2005). According to reports, a total of approximately 88 supporters were killed (UN 4 Jan. 2006), more than one hundred were wounded (RFI 2 Nov. 2005; HRW Nov. 2005), and several thousand were arrested across Ethiopia (ibid.; UN 4 Jan. 2006; HRW 13 Jan. 2006) after protests in June and November 2005 (ibid.).

In January 2006, opposition leaders remained in custody awaiting a hearing scheduled for 23 February 2006 (UN 4 Jan. 2006), some of them facing charges of treason (Jeuneafrique.com 4 Jan. 2006; HRW 13 Jan. 2006; UN 4 Jan. 2006) and genocide (ibid.; HRW 13 Jan. 2006). The punishment of those arrested can "range from three years' imprisonment to the death penalty" (BBC 29 Dec. 2005). In December 2005, while in custody, defendants were allegedly denied access to their lawyers (ibid.; Jeuneafrique.com 4 Jan. 2006; UN 4 Jan. 2006).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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