



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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### **ETH102024.E**

Ethiopia: Treatment of political dissidents by government authorities, specifically student and human rights activists (2005 - 2006)  
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Publicly available information on the treatment of political dissidents by government authorities in Ethiopia, specifically students and human rights activists, focuses largely on events following the 15 May 2005 parliamentary elections, the results of which led to protest demonstrations (UN 21 Mar. 2006, para. 71; US 8 Mar. 2006), as well as on events taking place in Oromia regional state (UN 11 Jan. 2006; HRW 13 Jan. 2006]. This Response does not contain information concerning the treatment of members of opposition political parties or of the press.

### **Post-election events in June 2005**

The election results were announced in early June 2005, after which supporters of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party started demonstrating (AI May 2006, 3). Hundreds of demonstrating students joined the protests (UN 21 Mar. 2006, para. 71). Concerning events in the country, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005* highlights the first-hand findings of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.a), a non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1991 to monitor and promote human rights in Ethiopia (EHRCO n.d.). Following the May elections, EHRCO reports that between June 6 and 8, 2005, "the police and army shot and killed 42 unarmed demonstrators in Addis Ababa," (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.a) and that between November 1 and 7, "military and police forces opened fire on rioters who were throwing rocks, and in some cases were armed with machetes and grenades, killing at least 40 individuals in Addis Ababa" (ibid.; see also Writenet May 2006, Sec. 3.2).

Other observers included several special rapporteurs and representatives, appointed by the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights to examine torture; the right to freedom of opinion and expression; extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; human rights defenders and arbitrary detention (UN 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 340-341, 346-348; ibid. 22 Mar. 2006, para. 192-195). They worked together to observe conditions in Ethiopia, receiving allegations of the arrest and detention at undisclosed locations of human rights activists and student demonstrators (ibid.; ibid. 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 340-341, 346-348). Despite a month-long ban on demonstrations declared by the Prime Minister following the election (ibid. 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 340; Writenet May 2006, Sec. 3.2), the UN special rapporteurs recorded the following events:

On 6 June 2005 at the two main Addis Ababa University campuses, several hundred peaceful demonstrating students were beaten with batons and rifle butts by police. The students were protesting the announcement of the provisional results of the 15 May 2005 Parliamentary elections, and demanding an investigation into alleged voting irregularities, including reported arrests and beating of opposition candidates in approximately 300 out of 547 constituencies. Other students protesting in Kotebe Teacher's College, the AAU's Commercial College and Technical College in Addis Ababa, were also beaten and arrested on 6 and 7 June 2005. At Kotebe, it is reported that, in response to the students throwing stones at the police and burning government vehicles, police opened fire, particularly on those who blocked police vehicles which were carrying arrested students. A female student, Shebray Delelagne, was killed; six other were wounded. Approximately 2000 students, as well as journalists were arrested. Around 500 students have been released, but the others remain incommunicado in police and military camps, including the Sendafa police training college, 40 km north of Addis Ababa. 26 persons have been killed as a result of security forces opening fire on the demonstrators. (ibid. 21 Mar. 2006, para. 71; see also ibid. 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 340; ibid. 27 Mar. 2006b, 72; ibid. 11 Jan. 2006).

The government has reportedly acknowledged the deaths of these 26 persons (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.a, 2.b).

According to *Country Reports 2005*, in the days following the June demonstrations, government security forces arrested between three to four thousand persons from their homes and held them in Zway (also Ziway) prison (ibid., Sec. 1.d; see also Writenet May 2006, Sec. 3.2) and Sendefa (also Sendafa) prison outside Addis Ababa (ibid.; see also AI 9 June 2005). Detainees reportedly include members of the political opposition, professionals and students (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.d). Students and other protestors have also reportedly been arrested in provincial towns (Writenet May 2006, Sec. 3.2), including in Gondar, Bure, Bahir Dar (also known as Bahar Dar), Debre Markos, Dessie and Awassa (HRW 15 June 2005). Amnesty International (AI) has expressed concern that detained students are at risk of torture (9 June 2005).

The UN special rapporteurs have brought the government's attention to the situation of specific individuals, following allegations of the arrest in June of Chernet Tadesse, Yared Hailemariam and Berhanu Adenaw, all human rights defenders and investigators for the EHRCO (UN 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 341).

No reasons were given for their arrests and their whereabouts were unknown at the time .... Concerns were expressed that the arrests ... may have been linked to their activities in defense of human rights, in particular, their investigations and reporting of the recent deaths and arrests of demonstrators in Addis Ababa .... (ibid.; see also ibid. 22 Mar. 2006, para. 192; ibid. 21 Mar. 2006, para. 71-72; HRW 15 June 2006)

Throughout November 2005, the UN special rapporteurs sent additional appeals to the Ethiopian government following allegations that several other human rights activists had been arrested (UN 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 347). These included Dr. Yakob Hailemariam, a former UN and International Criminal Court official; Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, founder of the EHRCO (ibid.; ibid. 21 Mar. 2006, para. 75; ibid. 22 Mar 2006, para. 194); Daniel Bekele, policy and advocacy manager at ActionAid, an international NGO in Ethiopia, who had previously survived an armed attack (ibid. 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 346, 348; US 8

Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.c; see also UN 22 Mar. 2006, para. 193); and Netsanet Demissie, the Director of the Ethiopian Organization for Social Justice (ibid. 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 348). Numerous members of the press as well as members of the Ethiopian Teacher's Association (ETA) were also detained following the election (ibid.; ibid. 22 Mar. 2006, para. 195; see also UN 27 Mar. 2006b, 71).

On 23 November 2005, the Ethiopian Government responded to appeals sent by the UN special rapporteurs regarding the arrest and treatment of post-election demonstrators by indicating that it was continuing to release detainees who had not been involved in the violence that had broken out during the demonstrations, while keeping others who had either been involved in or planned the violence to await prosecution (ibid. 22 Mar. 2006, para. 196; ibid. 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 349). The government also indicated that it was establishing a Neutral Inquiry Commission to investigate the post-election demonstrations and to determine whether security forces had used excessive force (ibid.; ibid. 22 Mar. 2006, para. 196; ibid. 27 Mar. 2006b).

In following up on the fate of the detainees who had been the subject of their appeals, the UN special rapporteurs indicate that, in December 2005, 131 persons and organizations had been charged by the Federal High Court in Addis Ababa with a number of offences, many of which carry the death penalty, including "'outrages against the Constitution,' obstructing the National Election Board, inciting and organizing armed uprising, endangering the integrity of the state, and high treason" (UN 27 Mar. 2006a, para. 358). Because some of these individuals were alleged to have beaten a Tigrayan person and set fire to Tigrayan property, they were also charged with genocide (ibid.). AI indicates that they were scheduled to go on trial on 2 May 2006 (May 2006, 1). A prosecutor at the December Federal High Court hearing, at which the accused were remanded, was quoted in a UN news article as saying that the charges pending against the defendants were punishable by a fifteen-year sentence, life sentence, or the death penalty (UN 28 Dec. 2005; AI May 2006, 21, 26). Among the 76 individuals on trial were human rights activists and academics, including Daniel Bekele, Netsanet Demissie, and the head of the Addis Ababa branch of the ETA, Kassahun Kebede, as well as academics Dr. Berhanu Negga, Gizachew Shifferaw, Dr. Hailu Araya, Professor Mesfin Woldemariam and Dr. Yakob Hailemariam (ibid., 2, 16).

### **Post-election events in November 2005**

Demonstrations and riots broke out again in November after the CUD called for more protests (Writenet May 2006, Sec. 3.2; US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.d). Thousands of cases of disappearances were reported after the demonstrations in November (ibid., Sec. 1.b) and between 40 and 42 demonstrators were shot and killed by security forces (ibid., Sec. 1.a; AI May 2006, 4; Writenet May 2006, Sec. 3.2). Another 200 persons were wounded, 7 police officers killed and "considerable" damage was done to government property (AI May 2006, 4). Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicates that federal police also shot student and other protestors in the Oromia and Amhara regional states in November (HRW 13 Jan. 2006). *Country Reports 2005* elaborates as follows:

Human rights organizations reported that the government had transported 10 to 18 thousand individuals (mostly youths aged 18-23 detained during the November mass house-to-house searches in Addis Ababa) to Dedessa, a military camp formerly used by the Derg regime located 375 kilometers west of the capital. Observers expressed concern that the camp's remote location and

lack of facilities threatened the health of detainees. Human rights organizations reported on similar detention camps in and around Bahir Dar. Most of these detainees were released by year's end. The government transported an unknown number of other detainees to other detention facilities around the country during the same November period. By year's end the government publicly announced that it had released all but three thousand detainees, who would be charged with relatively minor crimes potentially carrying sentences of up to several months confinement. (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.c; see also Writenet May 2006, Sec. 3.2)

## **Events in Oromia**

In November 2005, concurrent with the post-election demonstrations in Addis Ababa, thousands of Oromo students were protested the detention of persons of Oromo ethnicity as well as other Oromo-related political issues (AI 3 Feb. 2006). The demonstrations reportedly occurred in response to a call for a "popular uprising" that was posted on the Web site of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) (ibid. May 2006, 13), "a separatist rebel group opposed to Amhara and Tigrayan dominance in Ethiopia (The Observatory Apr. 2005, 12). According to AI, thousands of the mainly student demonstrators were detained and several were fatally shot (AI 3 Feb. 2006), a claim which the government refuted (ibid.). Many of those detained, in particular those held at Ambo palace prison and Senkele police camp, are alleged to have been tortured or ill-treated (ibid. May 2006, 13). In a submission to the UN Commission on Human Rights, the International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic and Other Minorities (IFPRERLOM) specifies the date, place and name of the Oromo students alleged to have been victims of extrajudicial killings from November 2005 to January 2006 (3 Mar. 2006, 2).

*Country Reports 2005* indicates that not only students, but also "numerous" ETA teachers were detained by security forces on the pretext that they were OLF sympathizers (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.d). An AI report says that the ETA has been highly critical of the government concerning the post-election events (AI May 2006, 6). The AI report also indicates that Ethiopian authorities have been trying to replace the ETA with a pro-government union for 13 years (ibid.; ibid. 4 Oct. 2006).

AI reports that in August 2006 several secondary school students were among the over 250 persons detained in Oromia following protests by students and others against government land-redistribution programs that benefited ruling party members (30 Aug. 2006). AI is of the opinion that they are at risk of torture or ill-treatment (30 Aug. 2006).

## **Human rights activists and protestors**

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a body created jointly by the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des Droits de l'Homme, FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (Organisation mondiale contre la torture, OMCT), indicates in an April 2005 report that members and supporters of the EHRCO have for many years experienced "severe acts of reprisals" by authorities, including assassination (The Observatory Apr. 2005, 22). The UN special representative on human rights defenders expressed concern in March 2006 about "activists reportedly remaining at serious risk of arrest, harassment and retaliation from the authorities" and by "information received indicating an

unfavorable environment and dangerous conditions that inhibit the work of human rights defenders" (UN 6 Mar. 2006, para. 589-590).

HRW, reporting on the "excessive force" used by the Ethiopian government to quell the post-election protests, notes that in recent years, people have been detained indefinitely without trial (13 Jan. 2006). Referring to government actions in response to the June demonstrations, the HRW reports that it was not the first time that Ethiopian security forces have killed large numbers of protestors (HRW 15 June 2005).

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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