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20 February 2007

ETH102157.E

Ethiopia: Protection services and legal recourse available to women who are victims of domestic violence (2005 - 2006)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In addition to the information about domestic violence in Section 5 of *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005*, the following information describes the situation of women and the extent of domestic violence in Ethiopia. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) program officer for Ethiopia was quoted in an October 2005 news article saying that "[i]n Ethiopia, between 94 and 91 percent of women between 15 and 49 years have been beaten and believe wife-beating is justified" for reasons such as "neglecting children, leaving the home without permission, refusing sex, not preparing food and talking with other men" (AFP 12 Oct. 2005). In its 2005 *Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women*, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that in Ethiopia, 71 percent of women who had been married or otherwise partnered had experienced either physical or sexual violence, and that 35 per cent of these women had experienced at least one incident of "severe" physical violence (WHO 2005). About 17 percent of the women respondents indicated that their first sexual encounter was rape (ibid.).

According to the study, 39 percent of the women "had never talked to anyone about the physical violence" (ibid.). Women who did seek help tended to approach local leaders most often, then seek medical assistance, and far less frequently, approach the police and the courts (ibid.). Those who did not look for assistance indicated that "they feared the consequences or had been threatened," or that they considered the violence to be "normal" or not "serious" (ibid.). However, in what it reported as an area of progress, Amnesty International (AI) notes that in 2005, Ethiopia amended the Penal Code to remove "the marital exemption for the crimes of bride abduction and associated rape" (AI 23 May 2006; Equality Now June 2005).

A non-governmental organization that was created to assist women is the Ethiopian Women Lawyer's Association (EWLA), "a not-for-profit women's advocacy group founded by women lawyers" (EWLA n.d.a). EWLA works from its headquarters in Addis Ababa, as well as in nine sub-cities and six branch offices (ibid. n.d.b), and reportedly has over 300 members nationwide (The Observatory April 2005, 24). According to its Web site, in addition to advocacy, EWLA provides legal aid in cases of violence against women (n.d.b). An *Ethiopian Herald* article cites the Executive Director of the EWLA as saying that in the nine months leading up to July 2005, 5,854 women sought help from EWLA, and that most of the cases were connected to domestic disputes and domestic violence (16 July 2005). According to its Web site, EWLA also runs a shelter for women victims of violence, which is full to capacity and cannot accept new residents (EWLA n.d.b). The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) notes that EWLA's shelter is the only shelter for women victims of sexual and domestic violence in Ethiopia (NOAS Mar. 2006).

The long-standing women's advocacy group - EWLA was founded in 1995 - has had to struggle to stay in existence (Observatory Apr. 2005, 24). In an April 2005 report, 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 Organization Against Torture (Organisation mondiale contre la torture, OMCT), describes government efforts to suspend EWLA's activities in 2001.

On August 23, 2001, EWLA publicly criticised the Ministry of Justice for its failure to effectively investigate, arrest and prosecute the known perpetrator in an ongoing case of domestic violence. On August 25, the Minister of Justice officially announced that EWLA was suspended for allegedly "engaging in activities different from those it was mandated by law," without substantiating its allegations. In early September 2001, the Ministry suspended EWLA's registration without officially informing the association of the reasons This suspension was finally lifted in October 2001. As a result of the suspension, however, all the activities of EWLA were suspended, some 50 of its employees were laid off and all the casework carried out by EWLA lawyers in the courts was interrupted. It was further reported that four girls under the care of the association and for whom it was paying school fees had their education interrupted because the association's bank account was frozen.

Since [the] end [of] 2001, EWLA could normally resume its activities, and is to date particularly engaged in drafting legislation promoting and protecting women's rights in Ethiopia. (Observatory April 2005, 24)

In November 2006, *The Ethiopian Herald* noted that a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) representative in Ethiopia had praised the "active mobilization at all levels [of society] supporting the end of domestic violence, abduction, rape and other forms of sexual abuse" (10 Nov. 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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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Afrol News; British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); Ethiopian Community Education and Development Association (CEDA); Ethiopian National Committee on Traditional Practice; European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net); Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch (HRW); Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); The Parliament of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Ethiobar.net); Reliefweb; UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN); United Kingdom, Home Office; University of Bern.

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