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Ethiopia: Treatment of Ethiopian citizens of Somali origin by the Ethiopian authorities
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to a 20 December 2009 report published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Ethiopia is home to a significant number of Somalis, who are concentrated in the eastern part of the country in the Somali region. Also known as Ogaden or Region 5 (HRW 3 July 2007), the Somali region is home to approximately five million predominantly Muslim inhabitants (Worldfocus 11 Nov. 2009).

Sources consulted by the Research Directorate report that Ethiopian government forces have clashed with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in the Somali region (HRW 20 Dec. 2009; US 25 Feb. 2009, Intr.; AI 2009). Founded in 1984 (ESISC 23 May 2008), the ONLF is fighting for the autonomy of Ogaden (ibid.; Reuters 14 Nov. 2009). According to the government of Ethiopia, the ONLF is a [translation] "terrorist group supported by Eritrea" (APA 5 Mar. 2009).

According to HRW, the "protracted and often brutal" conflict has resulted in serious abuses committed by the military in many parts of the region (20 Dec. 2009, Box. 1). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008* indicates that, in 2008, fighting between government forces and the ONLF resulted in human rights violations committed by all parties involved; in particular, food relief for drought victims was diverted (US 25 Feb. 2009, Intr.). The conflict has caused several thousand deaths over the last 15 years (Worldfocus 11 Nov. 2009).

The annual report published by Amnesty International (AI) in 2009 indicates that both forces have committed human rights abuses against civilians during the conflict. According to *Country Reports 2008*, in November 2008, battles erupted when "police forces attempted to force villagers from Laare and Puldeng villages . . . to move to a new area," resulting in the deaths of nine people and wounding several other civilians and police (US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 1.g). *Country Reports 2008* also indicates that, according to an ONLF report, Ethiopian forces killed 48 civilians and injured 50 others in the village of Mooyaha, in Ogaden, in December 2008 (ibid.).

In April 2007, in retaliation for an ONLF attack on an oil installation in Obole village in the Somali region that resulted in the deaths of several soldiers

and civilians, Ethiopian forces [AI official English version] “mounted a blockade on conflict-affected districts in the region, causing severe food shortages” (AI 2008). According to an article published by the Montreal daily newspaper *La Presse*, since April 2007, the government of Ethiopia has launched [translation] “a vast military operation” against the ONLF. During the conflict, Ethiopian troops have carried out [AI official English version] “mass arrests, torture, rape and extrajudicial executions of alleged ONLF supporters” (AI 2008).

In a report published on 6 March 2009, HRW states that, following an insurrection in Ogaden in 2007, Ethiopian troops adopted a strategy that consisted of killing a few people in the villages and then burning down their houses in an attempt to force out the rest of the villagers. In July 2007, the HRW Africa director stated that “Ethiopian troops are destroying villages and property, confiscating livestock and forcing civilians to relocate” (HRW 3 July 2007). Witnesses claim to have seen Ethiopian troops “firing upon and killing fleeing civilians” (ibid.). HRW indicates that in June 2007 government troops in Lebiga village killed 21 villagers who “resisted when Ethiopian forces tried to take their livestock” (ibid.).

According to AI, in 2007 hundreds of people were arrested on political grounds relating to the conflict (AI 2008). *Country Reports 2008* lists several cases of arrests made by the Ethiopian government, particularly that of eight men detained in March 2008 who were “suspected of involvement in the April 2007 ONLF attack on a Chinese-run oil facility in the Degehabur zone of the Somali Region” (US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 1.g). Also, eight ONLF members were reportedly convicted and sentenced to death for their [translation] “involvement” in an attack on the regional capital, Jijiga that took place in May 2007 (ESISC 23 May 2008). HRW reports that “Ethiopian security forces are also responsible for arbitrary detentions in the larger towns, particularly of family members of suspected ONLF members” (HRW 3 July 2007).

An article published on 4 August 2009 by *La Presse* indicates that a Canadian from Ethiopia was sentenced to life in prison by the Ethiopian High Court of Justice. The Canadian citizen, who is of Somali origin (AI 4 May 2007), has been accused of being an ONLF member (*La Presse* 4 Aug. 2009). According to his lawyer, [translation] “the Ethiopian government is after him because his grandfather . . . is a founding member of the ONLF” (ibid.). In another case, a man known to the authorities for having acted as a conflict resolution mediator in the Somali region was arrested in August 2007 (AI 2008). In 2008, he was tried and sentenced to 22 years in prison for his [AI official English version] “alleged involvement in two hand grenade attacks in 2007” (AI 2009). According to AI, he remains in detention [AI official English version] “to prevent him from giving evidence to a UN fact-finding mission” (AI 2009). Further information on these arrests could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were unsuccessful.

Internet Sites, including: Africa Action, Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP), Afrik.com, AllAfrica.com, Freedom House, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), International Crisis Group, Minority Rights Group International (MRG), Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Panapress (PANA), Radio France internationale (RFI), Reporters sans frontières (RSF), Syfia Grands Lacs, Voice of America (VOA).

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