



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

01 September 2009

ERI103224.E

Eritrea: Treatment of the Jeberti people by government authorities (2005 - August 2009)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The Jeberti (Jiberti/Djiberti/Jeberty) people are Tigrinya-speaking Muslims in Eritrea (Tronvoll 2009, 131; Bariagaber 1 Oct. 2006, 18). In an in-depth report on the human rights and political situation in Eritrea, Kjetil Tronvoll, a professor of human rights at the University of Oslo who has written extensively on Horn of Africa issues (Tronvoll 2009, 10), explains that the Jeberti live in the highlands of Eritrea and in the bordering Tigray regional state in Ethiopia (ibid., 111, 131). Tronvoll reports that Tigrinya-speakers, centred in the highlands, are the largest distinct group in Eritrea and make up approximately half of the country's population (ibid., 111).

According to Tronvoll, the minority Muslim Jeberti have been "marginalised and persecuted" for centuries by the Christian Orthodox majority in the highlands leading them to develop a culture distinct from Christian Tigrinya-speakers (ibid., 131). Tronvoll notes that the Jeberti are mostly merchants and urban dwellers, as access to agricultural lands dominated by Orthodox Christians has traditionally been denied to them (ibid., 111).

Tronvoll reports that the Jeberti sought and obtained recognition as a distinct ethnic group from the Ethiopian government before Eritrea became independent (ibid., 132). However, the fact that they had pursued and received such recognition "collectively stigmatized" the Jeberti in the view of the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) who saw the apparent cooperation with the Ethiopian government as evidence that the Jeberti were "'subversive" to the Eritrean struggle" for independence (ibid.). According to Tronvoll, towards the end of the war which led to the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia, the EPLF "deliberately targeted the Jeberti community," assassinating their leader, Yassin Aberra in January 1991 (ibid.).

Tronvoll notes that many Jeberti went into exile from Eritrea after its independence (ibid.). The Jeberti in exile continue to seek to be officially identified as a distinct group by the Eritrean government (ibid.; Bariagaber 1 Oct. 2006, 18), notably through the Eritrean al-Nahda Party which was formed by Jeberti (Tronvoll 2009, 132; Bariagaber 1 Oct. 2006, 18). The Eritrean al-Nahda party is part of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance, a coalition of Eritrean opposition groups (Tronvoll 2009, 132; Awate.com 20 Jan. 2008; GIC 8 Jan. 2006). According to Tronvoll, this association receives support from the Ethiopian government (Tronvoll 2009, 132).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, Tronvoll indicated that the "EPLF does not believe in minority rights per se" and that minority groups are "hardly represented" in the country's institutions (21 Aug. 2009). He further reported that because of their opposition to "the EPLF's classification that they are only "Muslim Tigrinyas," [the Jeberti] are liable to be targeted by the government"(Tronvoll 21 Aug. 2009).

Tronvoll contended that while some individual Jebertis were members of the nationalist EPLF, traditional Jeberti leaders were loyal to Ethiopia before Eritrean independence and did not support the EPLF (21 Aug. 2009). Tronvoll further noted that since Eritrean independence was realized, the Jeberti people have felt "insecure about the new government" and are "reportedly harassed and intimidated" by the Eritrean government (21 Aug. 2009).

Corroborating information about the treatment of the Jeberti people 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.

References

Awate.com. 20 January 2008. "Eritrean Opposition Organizations: New Push Towards Alliance."
<<http://www.awate.com/portal/content/view/4742/3>> [Accessed 26 Aug. 2009]

Bariagaber, Assefaw. 1 October 2006. Writenet. *Eritrea: Challenges and Crises of a New State*. (Writenet/Refworld)
<<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4538821e4.pdf>> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2009]

Gulf Information Centre (GIC). 8 January 2006. "Eritrean al-Nhada Party: Jebertta is an Ethnic Group with Distinct Peculiarity, Culture and Tradition." (Togoruba)
<<http://www.togoruba.org/togoruba1964/mainTogorubamap/mainMap/headingMap/English/2006/newsJan-2006/0801GIC06-07NE.html>> [Accessed 26 Aug. 2009]

Tronvoll, Kjetil. Professor of Human Rights, University of Oslo, Norway. 21 August 2009. Correspondence.

_____. 2009. *The Lasting Struggle for Freedom in Eritrea: Human Rights and Political Development, 1991-2009*. Commissioned by the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights. (Awate.com)
<<http://www.awate.com/portal/content/view/5269/6/>> [Accessed 20 Aug. 2009]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to reach the former head of a human rights centre in Eritrea and representatives of Minority Rights Group International were unsuccessful.

Internet Sources, including: Amnesty International (AI), Association of Eritrean Jeberti in North America, Association for the Defense of Human Rights of the Eritrean People, Arkokabay.com, Jeberti.com, Human Rights Concern - Eritrea, Human Rights Watch (HRW), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Factiva, International Crisis Group, Minority Rights Groups International (MRGI), Nharnet.com, SUWERA Centre for Human Rights (SCHR), Tigrai.net, United Kingdom (UK) Border Agency, United States (US) Department of State.

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.