



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Ethiopia

Ethiopia – ETH37377 – Amharas –
Asylum seekers – Coalition for Unity and
Democracy (CUD) – Ginbot 7
10 September 2010

1. Are Amharas discriminated against in Ethiopia?

Reports indicate that in the past two decades Tigrayans have tended to be promoted to senior positions in government offices and in the military, and that there has been discrimination against Amharas.

Advice provided in November 2007 by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) directly addressed the question of whether Amharas were discriminated against in Ethiopia. According to DFAT:

This may depend on where they reside. It has also been widely rumoured that non-Amharas are promoted to top posts in government offices to ensure ‘ethnic diversity’. As Amharas had been privileged during the Emperor’s time, key government offices were naturally given to them then. Since the downfall of the Military regime over 15 years ago, the government in power has shown visible signs of discrimination in terms of making the Amhara region [a] low development priority and discriminating against the Amhara intellectuals. It also happens to be that key opposition groups are led by Amharas including All Amhara Peoples’ Organisation (AAPO), CUD and Ethiopian Patriotic Front (EPF) among others.¹

The US Department of State’s report on human rights practices has noted that Amharas and Tigrayans “played a dominant role” in influencing political and cultural life in Ethiopia, but that within the military “Tigrayans increasingly dominated the senior officer corps both through preferential promotions and heightened attrition among, and purges of, non-Tigrayans”.²

The federal system of government drew boundaries roughly along major ethnic group lines, and there were “occasional reports that officials terminated the employment of teachers and other government workers if they were not of the dominant ethnic group in the region”. Most political parties remained “primarily ethnically based”.³

¹ DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No. 07/82 – CISQUEST 9137/8: Ethiopia: Country Information* (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 November 2007), 14 November – Attachment 1.

² US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Ethiopia*, March, Section 6 – Attachment 2.

³ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Ethiopia*, March, Section 6 – Attachment 2.

The US Department of State also reported that in September 2009 “several opposition party leaders reported an intensification of arrests of opposition supporters, especially in the Oromiya and Amhara regions”, and published lists of members and supporters arrested included more than 230 in the Amhara region.⁴

In a recent report on violations of freedom of expression and association in Ethiopia, Human Rights Watch observed that opposition parties had long complained that resources are awarded on a political basis within local *kebele* structures. Interviews conducted in 2009 indicated discrimination against Amhara farmers in areas that had supported the opposition in the previous general elections:

Opposition supporters in Amhara described a trend of discriminatory resource allocation, with farmers unable to access seeds and fertilizers if perceived to support the opposition. They noted, however, that in their kebeles such discriminatory treatment did not extend to the health or education sectors. One farmer described the restrictions faced by opposition supporters in Amhara:

The co-operative gets [the hybrid maize seeds] from the government, but the co-op selects whom to give them to and UDJ [Unity for Democracy and Justice] members cannot get them. The same with fertilizer or seedlings for cattle fodder from the rural development office. Those who do not support the government get nothing.

A farmer from Merawi woreda, also in Amhara, told Human Rights Watch that the harassment and discriminatory treatment stemmed from the pattern of voting in the 2005 election. “This woreda, in the eyes of the EPRDF, is against them because it voted CUD in 2005, so the government handles it roughly,” he said.⁵

2. How are failed asylum seekers treated in Ethiopia?

Recent information on the treatment of failed asylum seekers is very limited, but indicates that the treatment of a returnee by the authorities would depend on the extent to which the person was seen to be a threat to the current government.

In 2006 Amnesty International stated it believed that:

CUD activists and suspected activists at national or local levels, as well as civil society activists and journalists who had criticized the government, who have fled the country on account of experienced or threatened human rights violations, would be those who are at risk of arbitrary and indefinite detention, possible torture or ill-treatment, unfair trial or even extrajudicial execution, if forcibly returned to Ethiopia.⁶

Advice provided to the RRT by DFAT in February 2008 stated that it would be very difficult to assess what threat a person who had previously been active with the CUD would face on return to Ethiopia. DFAT advised that the “key question would be whether or not Ethiopian

⁴ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Ethiopia*, March, Section 1(e) – Attachment 2.

⁵ Human Rights Watch 2010, “*One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure*”: *Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*, March, pp. 25-26 – Attachment 3.

⁶ Amnesty International 2006, *Ethiopia: Prisoners of conscience on trial for treason: opposition party leaders, human rights defenders and journalists*, 2 May, p. 12 – Attachment 4.

authorities saw him as a real threat. If so, then he could face serious problems, but if not then he might be able to return without incident”.⁷

3. What is the situation with supporters of the Ginbot 7 and the CUD at present?

In 2010 Freedom House has observed that there has been increasing intolerance of dissent and that “even ordinary citizens face harassment or arrest for speaking out against the government”.⁸ In such a political environment, those who were supporters of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) at the time of the 2005 elections and current supporters of opposition parties that have been linked with the CUD, including Ginbot 7, are vulnerable to adverse attention from the government.

In the general elections in May 2010, Meles Zenawi’s Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) increased its majority, winning 545 seats in the 547-member parliament. Since the previous elections in 2005 in which the CUD was the main opposition coalition, the strongest opposition leaders have been divided and erosion of political liberties and freedoms has put Ethiopia on “a path towards becoming a de facto one-party state”.⁹

At the time of the 2005 elections, the CUD included four parties: the All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP), led by Hailu Shawal; the United Ethiopia Democratic Party-Medhin (UEDP-Medhin), led by Admassu Gebeyehu; the Ethiopian Democratic League (EDL), led by Chekol Getahun; and Rainbow-Ethiopia, led by Birhanu Nega.¹⁰ After the 2005 elections, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia assigned the CUD party name and license to a splinter group of the CUD and the party’s ballot symbol to another former CUD coalition party – Lidetu Ayalew’s EDP-Medhin.¹¹

After the November 2005 protests, 131 CUD leaders, journalists and civil society leaders were arrested and charged with a variety of offenses, including treason and “outrages against the constitutional order.” In 2007, the politicians were convicted but subsequently pardoned and released from prison.¹²

Those CUD leaders pardoned included Birtukan Mideska, who in 2008 went on to form the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party, considered by supporters to be the inheritors of the CUD even though they retained neither the CUD name nor symbol.¹³ Birtukan Mideska is

⁷ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, *DFAT Report No. 768 – Ethiopia: RRT Information Request: ETH32591*, 1 February – Attachment 5.

⁸ Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Ethiopia (2010)*, June <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7821> – Accessed 10 September 2010 – Attachment 7.

⁹ ‘Country watchlist: Ethiopia’ 2010, *Economist Intelligence Unit – Business Africa*, 16 June – Attachment 8.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch 2010, “*One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure*”: *Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*, March, p. 12 – Attachment 3.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch 2010, “*One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure*”: *Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*, March, p. 18-19 – Attachment 3.

¹² Human Rights Watch 2010, “*One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure*”: *Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*, March, p. 16 – Attachment 3.

¹³ International Crisis Group 2009, ‘Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents – Africa Report N°153’, UNHCR Refworld website, 4 September, p. 10 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4aa4c0c82.pdf> – Accessed 8 September 2010 – Attachment 9.

currently serving a life sentence after her pardon for alleged involvement in the post election violence of 2005 was revoked.¹⁴

The UDJ is part of the current main opposition coalition, the Forum for Democratic Dialogue (Medrek),¹⁵ but former CUD members Hailu Shawal's AEUP, Lidetu Ayalew's EDP-Medhin and the CUDP are not.¹⁶

The Political Handbook of the World reports that the currently registered party known as CUD/Kinijit, led by Ayele Chamismo, is the faction now recognised by the government as the "official" CUD party. Chamismo, described by critics as having been co-opted by the government, was elected to the local council in Addis Ababa in April 2008, with the EPRDF winning the remaining 137 of the council's 138 seats.¹⁷

Birhanu Nega – also amongst those prominent opposition figures arrested in 2005, sentenced to life imprisonment, then pardoned and released – went on to found the opposition group, Ginbot 7.¹⁸ Also known as the Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy, Ginbot 7 was established in May 2008 and reportedly "absorbed CUD's most radical diaspora members".¹⁹ The US Department of State has reported that, in April 2009 security officials detained 32 persons allegedly affiliated with Ginbot 7 for their suspected involvement in a terrorist assassination plot:

Those charged included several current and retired army officers, including two generals, along with senior opposition political figures. Those detained were held for more than a month without charges while police gathered evidence, during which time family members were not informed of their whereabouts. The detainees were denied pretrial access to legal counsel, and several alleged mistreatment while in detention. On August 6, the Federal High Court found 13 other defendants guilty in absentia, one not guilty in absentia, and the 32 who were detained were ordered to present their defense cases. Of the 32, the court acquitted five defendants on November 19. On December 22, the court sentenced 40 Ginbot Seven defendants: five to death, 33 to life terms, and two to 10 years' imprisonment.²⁰

In an EPRDF meeting prior to the 2010 elections, President Meles Zenawi reportedly "accused the legal opposition parties (Medrek and OFDM) of being infiltrated by illegal organisations (Ginbot 7, OLF, EPRP) and had called for them to be investigated".²¹

In relation to the current treatment of those who were supporters of the CUD at the time of the 2005 elections, the US Department of State has reported that nine of the 37 CUD members

¹⁴ Country of Origin Research and Information 2010, 'CORI Country Report: Ethiopia', UNHCR Refworld website, January, p. 27 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4b9e03f92.pdf> – Accessed 8 September 2010 – Attachment 10.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch 2010, "One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure": *Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*, March, p. 20 – Attachment 3.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch 2010, "One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure": *Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*, March, p. 14 – Attachment 3.

¹⁷ 'Ethiopia' in *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition 2010*, pp. 470-1 – Attachment 11.

¹⁸ 'Ethiopia: Ethiopia asked to name "plotters"' 2009, *BBC*, 6 May – Attachment 12.

¹⁹ International Crisis Group 2009, 'Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents – Africa Report N°153', UNHCR Refworld website, 4 September, p. 13 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4aa4c0c82.pdf> – Accessed 8 September 2010 – Attachment 9.

²⁰ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Ethiopia*, March, Section 1(d) – Attachment 2.

²¹ 'Zenawi wants to turn the page on 2005' 2010, *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, 29 May – Attachment 13.

arrested and tortured in 2006 remained in prison at the end of 2009,²² and that several hundred other political detainees, including CUD, ONLF, and OLF members, also remained in prison.²³

In 2008, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada reported advice from the Secretary of a chapter of the CUD/Kinijit in Toronto that “relatives of members of CUD are treated as ‘enemy’ of the government of Ethiopia” and were still subjected to discrimination in employment, refusal of business licence applications or loss of existing business licences, and denial of university admission or grants.²⁴

In a 2010 report on violations of freedom of expression and association in Ethiopia, Human Rights Watch observed that opposition parties had long complained that resources are awarded on a political basis within the local *kebele* and sub-*kebele* structures. In interviews conducted in 2009:

A farmer from Merawi woreda, also in Amhara, told Human Rights Watch that the harassment and discriminatory treatment stemmed from the pattern of voting in the 2005 election. “This woreda, in the eyes of the EPRDF, is against them because it voted CUD in 2005, so the government handles it roughly,” he said.²⁵

Of more general relevance, the US Department of States observed that opposition party members “consistently and credibly reported that in small towns, authorities detained persons in police stations for long periods without charge or access to a judge, and that sometimes these persons’ whereabouts were unknown for several months. Opposition parties registered many complaints during the year that government militias beat and detained their supporters”.²⁶

Attachments

1. DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No. 07/82 – CISQUEST 9137/8: Ethiopia: Country Information* (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 November 2007), 14 November. (CISNET Ethiopia CX188329)
2. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Ethiopia*, March.
3. Human Rights Watch 2010, “*One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure*”: *Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*, March. (CISNET Library)

²² US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Ethiopia*, March, Section 1(c) – Attachment 2.

²³ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Ethiopia*, March, Section 1(e) – Attachment 2.

²⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, *ETH102699.E – Ethiopia: Treatment of relatives of members of opposition parties, especially the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) (2006-2007)*, 4 January – Attachment 14.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch 2010, “*One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure*”: *Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*, March, pp. 25-26 – Attachment 3.

²⁶ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Ethiopia*, March, Section 1(d) – Attachment 2.

4. Amnesty International 2006, *Ethiopia: Prisoners of conscience on trial for treason: opposition party leaders, human rights defenders and journalists*, 2 May.
5. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, *DFAT Report No. 768 – Ethiopia: RRT Information Request: ETH32591*, 1 February.
6. Deleted.
7. Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Ethiopia (2010)*, June <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7821> – Accessed 10 September 2010.
8. ‘Country watchlist: Ethiopia’ 2010, *Economist Intelligence Unit – Business Africa*, 16 June. (FACTIVA)
9. International Crisis Group 2009, ‘Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents – Africa Report N°153’, UNHCR Refworld website, 4 September, p. 10 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4aa4c0c82.pdf> – Accessed 8 September 2010.
10. Country of Origin Research and Information 2010, ‘CORI Country Report: Ethiopia’, UNHCR Refworld website, January, p. 27 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4b9e03f92.pdf> – Accessed 8 September 2010.
11. ‘Ethiopia’ in *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition 2010*, pp. 470-1.
12. ‘Ethiopia: Ethiopia asked to name “plotters”’ 2009, *BBC*, 6 May. (CISNET Ethiopia CX226180)
13. ‘Zenawi wants to turn the page on 2005’ 2010, *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, 29 May. (FACTIVA)
14. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, *ETH102699.E – Ethiopia: Treatment of relatives of members of opposition parties, especially the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) (2006-2007)*, 4 January. (REFINFO)