



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

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Was the Ethiopian army involved in violence during the 2005 elections?

An *IRIN News* report on the killing of student protesters following the 2005 election states:

“At least 20 people were reported killed and others wounded following an outbreak of violence in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, as students demonstrated against alleged fraud in recent elections, hospital sources said on Tuesday. Police commander Mulgeta Shiferaw said the police had detained 520 students and protesters. A further 50 ‘hooligans’ were also arrested, he added, without confirming the number of those killed. The deaths, according to sources, occurred during clashes between Ethiopian security forces and the stone-throwing students as well as other protesters at the main University in Addis Ababa and at a nearby college. Monday’s violence was followed by similar clashes at two other college campuses on Tuesday, which riot police quickly broke up. The students have accused the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front of election fraud after preliminary results showed that it had won the majority of provisional seats following elections on 15 May.” (IRIN News (8 June 2005) *Ethiopia: Scores reported killed in student unrest*)

This report refers to the presence of the army as follows:

“The army’s special forces stood by, heavily armed with assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades. Riot police with tear gas and a water cannon were also present.” (ibid))

A *Human Rights Watch* report refers to the involvement of “security forces”, stating

“The current wave of arrests followed a chaotic week in Addis Ababa that saw security forces put down a series of election-related protests with excessive force. The disorder in the capital reached a bloody peak on Wednesday, when security forces responded to incidents of rock-throwing and looting by opening fire indiscriminately on large crowds of people, killing at least 36 and wounding more than 100.” (Human Rights Watch (14 June 2005) *Ethiopia: Crackdown Spreads Beyond Capital*)

In a paragraph headed “Cautious” a *BBC News* report states:

“The BBC’s Mohammed Adow in Addis Ababa says that Wednesday’s shooting began after army special forces arrived at the central business district, where

protesters were throwing stones. However, it is unclear whether the gunfire came from the heavily armed troops or the regular police, our correspondent says." (BBC News (11 June 2005) *Ethiopia head defends crackdown*)

The opening paragraph of a public statement from *Amnesty International* refers to the killing of protesters by riot police, stating:

"In the past two days riot police reportedly shot dead over 30 protestors in the capital Addis Ababa and began systematic arrests of leaders and members of the main opposition party, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), as well as several journalists of the private press. The riot police used live ammunition to target protestors in the central Mercato and other districts. The demonstrations reportedly started peacefully but turned into stone-throwing, building of barricades and burning of vehicles when police started shooting. At least 150 people are also reported to have been wounded in the shootings. Police said two police officers had been killed by the protestors." (Amnesty International (2 November 2005) *Ethiopia: Over 30 reported dead and several hundred detained in fierce crackdown* AFR 25/016/200)

In a paragraph headed "Cover-up" a *BBC News* report states:

"People took to the streets of the capital, Addis Ababa, and other cities in June and November last year to protest the outcome of a general election in May. The report said that the government had concealed the true extent of deaths at the hands of the police. It said that 193 people had been killed, including 40 teenagers. Six policemen were also killed and some 763 people injured. They had been shot, beaten and strangled. The judge described the deaths as a massacre and said the toll could well have been higher. 'The police fired, definitely, as a kind of massacre of the demonstrators - especially in Addis, where more than 160 civilians were dead,' by shooting, he told the BBC." (BBC News (19 October 2006) *Ethiopian protesters 'massacred'*)

In a section titled "Killings of demonstrators and mass arrests" (section 2.2) an *Amnesty International* report refers to an army unit known as "Agaazi" as follows:

"Peaceful demonstrations led to violent confrontations with the security forces. A special army unit, known as *Agaazi*, reportedly shot dead at least 36 protesters and wounded many others in Addis Ababa on 8 June." (Amnesty International (1 May 2006) *Prisoners of conscience on trial for treason: opposition party leaders, human rights defenders and journalists* AI Index: AFR 25/013/2006, p.3)

See also *Addis Tribune* article which states:

"Readers may recall that Addisu Legesse predicted the inevitability of insurrection just two days prior to the AAU students planned peaceful class boycott/hunger strike. Then on the eve of the class boycott agent provocateurs were sent to the campus to arrest students with intentions to sabotage the peaceful protest. The action was also meant to instigate resistance that may be interpreted as student riot in defiance of the state of emergency. When the student protest was joined by taxi-drivers and other people on Wednesday 8

June, the Agaazi, who had already proved their brutality towards defenceless students, were despatched with licence to kill protesters. On the day of the massacre Bereket Simon went on record defending the killing as a just measure against an insurrection.” (Addis Tribune (17 June 2005) *Ethiopia: Appropriate Response to a Foul Political Game*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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