



**Ethiopia - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Tuesday 15 & Wednesday 16 May 2018**

**Treatment of the Oromo including applicable to the appointment of the new PM; Information on the situation of the army/government relating to the appointment of the new PM**

*Minority Rights Group International* states in a report issued in January 2018 that:

“The Oromo community constitutes the largest ethnic group in the country, with some estimates suggesting they comprise between 25 and 40 per cent of the population. Though socially, economically and religiously diverse, Oromo are united by a shared language, also widely spoken in northern Kenya and parts of Somalia. Despite their large numbers, Oromo have suffered a long history of exclusion and forced assimilation by the Ethiopian government, leading to the decline of their pastoralist lifestyle” (*Minority Rights Group International (January 2018) World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Ethiopia : Oromo*).

A publication released in March 2018 by *Amnesty International* states that:

“Six months after the end of the State of Emergency Proclamation (2016) that had been in force for 10 months, the Council of Ministers of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia declared another state of emergency on 16 February 2018. The latest State of Emergency Proclamation (Proclamation), if adopted by the country’s federal parliament- House of Peoples Representatives (HPR), will remain in force for six months commencing from 16 February 2018” (*Amnesty International (1 March 2018) Annex: Commentary on the State of Emergency Proclamation [AFR 25/7982/2018]*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“On 15 February Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn announced his decision to resign from office, which came just days after the release of hundreds of prisoners. The next day, the Council of Ministers declared a state of emergency, which it said, was necessary to forestall the complete breakdown of law and order threatening the constitutional order” (*ibid*, p.4).

*Amnesty International* in March 2018 notes that:

“Abiy’s elevation to the helm of the ruling coalition comes at a time when the country has declared a state of emergency, the second of its kind in less than two years, imposing severe restrictions on the exercise of human rights and freedoms at a time when Ethiopians are demanding greater freedom and respect for human rights in their country. In one of the most shocking incidents since the announcement of the state of emergency on 16 February, security forces killed at least 12 civilians and wounded many more in the southern town of Moyale. The Command Post for the state of emergency admitted wrongful killings of civilians in Moyale, alleging it was caused by “mistaken intelligence report”” (*Amnesty International (28 March 2018) Incoming Ethiopian prime minister must address deep-rooted human rights crisis*).

A report published in March 2018 by *Amnesty International* states that:

“The Ethiopian government's announcement in January that it would release jailed political leaders, some already convicted and others with ongoing trials, was music to the ears of many, including the prisoners' families and friends, as well as human rights activists, but few thought it would come to pass. In the same announcement, the government also promised to shut down the notorious Maekelawi Detention Centre where most of the prisoners, and many others before them, were held and in many cases tortured or ill-treated. The government will not admit that most of the detainees, who it labelled "criminals", were in fact held on false charges and simply for their political views and activities. Well, to the surprise of the doubters, the government made good its promise, and has so far released more than 7,000 prisoners, including renowned journalist Eskinder Nega, who spent more than seven years behind bars, and prominent opposition figure Bekele Gerba. But in a twist of events just a few weeks later, the high hopes raised by the government's perceived move towards reform were dashed when it declared a state of emergency. This was amid heightened political tension and instability following a 3-day strike in the Oromia Region which disrupted transportation and flow of goods and services into the capital, Addis Ababa, and the resignation of Prime Minister Haile Mariam Desalegn. And Ethiopia continues to disappoint. On the night of 25 March 2018, Eskinder Nega was re-arrested, along with 10 other people. This is a clear abuse of power by the Ethiopian authorities and serves as yet more evidence that the state of emergency is being cynically exploited for political ends. Already the serious human rights violations that many had feared and warned could result from this state of emergency have started materializing. On 10 March, Ethiopian security forces shot dead 10 people and injured 15 others in the southern town of Moyale, on the Kenyan border. This use of deadly force by the security forces, which the Ethiopian government has sought to explain away as a "mistake" due to incorrect intelligence of rebel activity by the Oromo Liberation Front, has already displaced thousands of people – with at least 8,000 of them fleeing across the border into Kenya” (*Amnesty International* (28 March 2018) *Ethiopia, what a disappointment!*).

*BBC News* in April 2018 states:

“Abiy Ahmed has been sworn in as Ethiopia's new prime minister, replacing Hailemariam Desalegn, who unexpectedly resigned last month... He is leader of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), one of the four ethnic parties which make up the ruling the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition” (*BBC News* (3 April 2018) *Abiy Ahmed becomes Ethiopia's prime minister*).

This document also notes that:

“When he is sworn in, he will become the country's first Oromo leader - the ethnic group at the centre of nearly three years of anti-government protests, which have left hundreds of people dead. One of their main complaints is that they have been politically, economically and culturally marginalised for years - despite being the country's largest group. The election of Mr Abiy - who is believed to have huge support among the Oromo youth as well as other ethnic groups - may change that” (*ibid*).

This document also states that:

“He has served in the military and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, before becoming the founder and director of the country's Information Network and Security Agency, which is responsible for cyber-security in a country where the government exercises tight control over the internet.

After that he became the minister for science and technology” (ibid).

A report issued in April 2018 by *Reuters* notes that:

“Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed travelled on Saturday to a region where clashes have displaced nearly a million people, his first trip since being sworn in as premier five days ago” (Reuters (7 April 2018) *Ethiopia's PM seeks end to violence that displaced nearly a million*).

This document also states that:

“The ruling EPRDF coalition picked Abiy last month to replace Hailemariam Desalegn, who quit to clear the way for reforms in Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous nation which has been racked by violence for the last three years. Hundreds have been killed by security forces in Oromiya, the violence triggered by land rights but largely fuelled by a sense of political and economic marginalisation among the young. After taking the oath of office, the former army lieutenant colonel struck a conciliatory tone and addressed the need for ethnic unity. Since January Addis Ababa has released thousands of prisoners that included dissidents and journalists in a bid to calm discontent” (ibid).

*Voice of America* in April 2018 states:

“Days after swearing in its new prime minister, Ethiopia has begun to make good on promised reforms. In the past week, officials have closed an infamous detention center and released 11 jailed journalists and politicians. Former prisoners and journalists, however, say that many detainees have simply been moved to different facilities, and they question whether the symbolic closure and releases signify real change” (Voice of America (8 April 2018) *Ethiopia Closes Infamous Prison, But Activists Await Deeper Reforms*).

In April 2018 the *International Crisis Group* points out that:

“New PM Abiy Ahmed took several measures to mitigate ethnic tensions, promote national unity and relax restrictions on civil liberties. Head of ethnic Oromo party, Abiy Ahmed, elected chairman of ruling coalition Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front late March, sworn in as prime minister 2 April” (International Crisis Group (April 2018) *Crisis Watch April 2018, Ethiopia*).

In April 2018 the *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project* states that:

“Since the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn on 15 February, followed by the 16 February State of Emergency, political violence in Ethiopia has been marked by two primary trends – a decrease in riots and protests, and an increase in violence against civilians...Riots and protests spiked in the week of the resignation (beginning 11 February), but have since dropped dramatically to an average of 3 protests per week between 25 February and 25 March (see Figure 1). Two significant developments explain this drop-off in protests. The first is the State of Emergency and subsequent crackdown on Oromo dissent. Second, the chair of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), Abiy Ahmed, was elected as

Ethiopian Prime Minister on 2 April. The drop in protests can be partly explained by the positive nationwide response to Ahmed's election. The government's efforts to release prisoners who had been held under the State of Emergency is also an attempt to appease tensions" (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (12 April 2018) *Violence Against Civilians in Ethiopia*).

Reuters in April 2018 notes:

"Ethiopia's new premier Abiy Ahmed named a new defence minister on Thursday as part of a reshuffle to help implement reforms demanded by the public during unrest in which hundreds were killed by security forces" (Reuters (19 April 2018) *Ethiopia's new premier reshuffles cabinet as part of reform bid*).

This document also states that:

"Abiy named 10 new ministers but retained the finance and foreign ministers from the cabinet of his predecessor Hailemariam Desalegn, who resigned in February to pave the way for the reforms" (ibid).

It is also pointed out in this report that:

"Parliament swore in some 10 new ministers on Thursday and six others were moved to head other ministries. Motuma Mekassa, a former minister of mines, petroleum and natural gas, was named defence minister. Abiy also named new industry, energy, trade, mining, health, and revenue ministers, as well as an attorney general. Those he retained included Finance Minister Abraham Tekeste and Foreign Minister Workneh Gebeyehu, both of whom Hailemariam appointed in late 2016. Every lawmaker in the 547-seat parliament is from the ruling EPRDF coalition" (ibid).

This report also states:

"Abiy appointed former parliament speaker Abadula Gemedo as the national security advisor. He also named a new federal police commissioner, a new director general of the Information Network Security Agency, which oversees cybersecurity, and a new director general of METEC, a military-industrial conglomerate. All four are civilians, a change from previous governments in which such posts have been held by men from the security branches. On visits to different parts of the country, Abiy has stressed unity among the many ethnic groups and has promised to expand political and civil rights over time" (ibid).

In April 2018 *IHS Global Insight* states in a report that:

"Already since taking office, Ahmed has restored internet services in Oromia (restricted from the beginning of the state of emergency) and visited the city of Ambo (a focal point for anti-government protests), and released a number of prominent prisoners. Ahmed will likely seek to deliver progress on these demands gradually over the coming months in order to derive the greatest positive response from each action. He is unlikely to officially end the state of emergency early, but instead will likely ease its restrictions (for example, ordering federal forces back to their barracks and allowing peaceful demonstrations), so that it has less impact on the population. He will be facilitated in this by his new defence minister, who officially oversees the emergency, and an OPDO-dominated National Security Council. Outlook and implications Protest outlook" (IHS Global Insight (25 April 2018) *New Ethiopian PM's*

*approach towards demonstrators' demands, contraband networks will determine protest and violence one-year outlook*

This report also notes that:

“Prime Minister Ahmed partly owes his swift political rise to an openness by EPRDF leaders to an Oromo prime minister in the hope that this will help placate widespread anti-government protests in Ethiopia's Oromia region, which these elites believe is key to ensuring the coalition's political future...” (ibid).

A report issued in April 2018 by *Chatham House* states that:

“Dr Abiy Ahmed faces an enormous challenge in satisfying the huge range of expectations from different constituencies clamouring for representation in Ethiopia's multi-faceted ethnic federation. After a turbulent three years for Ethiopia, including large-scale anti-government protests, new prime minister Dr Abiy Ahmed is likely to enjoy a honeymoon period - and seems early on to have persuaded many he can bring stability, unity and reform to the country. Abiy - an Oromo leader in his early 40s with a mixed ethnic and religious background – is now the youngest leader of any African country, and heads up one of the four ethnicallybased constituent parties, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO). He faces significant long-term obstacles that will need to be confronted, and the pace of change will create tensions and significant resistance, especially considering Dr Abiy's rise was partially a direct response to the popular protests which have gripped Ethiopia since 2014, particularly in the Oromia and Amhara regions, which account for almost 60 per cent of the population” (Chatham House (27 April 2018) *Ethiopia's Prime Minister Shows Knack for Balancing Reform and Continuity*

This report also states:

“Oromos now make up a majority on the National Security Council, which gives OPDO significant influence, including deciding when to lift the six-month state of emergency which was reimposed in February, and opposed by many Oromo MPs” (ibid).

A report released in May 2018 by *Dun and Bradstreet* states that:

“Abiye Ahmed was sworn in during April. He is leader of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (the largest bloc in the ruling EPRDF coalition) and the first Oromo to serve as prime minister since the EPRDF took power in 1991. Prime Minister Ahmed has positioned himself as a reformist and is expected to make some progress on pushing through political, social and economic reforms that ease tensions, particularly among the disgruntled Oromo and Amhara populations. For instance, the new prime minister has emphasised the importance of adhering to constitutionally-mandated rights concerning expression of political views, equality under national law, public sector accountability and protection of human rights. These messages have been well-received by many ruling coalition members and opposition leaders. Following the appointment of Ahmed, the Oromo ethnic group has control of the positions of prime minister, president and speaker of parliament - three most powerful political positions in the country. However, the new prime minister will have to contend with entrenched and powerful interests at the heart of government and in the military, which are controlled by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The TPLF has long dominated the country's political life, despite representing an ethnic minority that makes up around 6% of Ethiopians and being a minor partner in

the EPRDF coalition. In addition to this, the Oromos do not control an outright majority of seats in parliament and will need the support of other groups to pursue a wide-ranging reform agenda” (Dun and Bradstreet (1 May 2018) *Ethiopia*).

In May 2018 *Reuters* states that:

“The choice of Abiy, 41, as premier by the coalition that has ruled Ethiopia since 1991 has raised expectations of greater freedom...” (Reuters (2 May 2018) *Ethiopian state of emergency must end, says journalist freed from jail*).

This document also states that:

“The government has this year released thousands of prisoners including dissidents and journalists in a bid to calm discontent” (ibid).

This document also points out that:

“Since being sworn in a month ago, Abiy has met opposition politicians and traveled to parts of the country that were hotbeds of dissent against the previous administration” (ibid).

In May 2018 the *Washington Post* notes that:

“The accession of Abiy, who hails from the Oromo community, brought a sharp drop in tension. Since he took office, Internet service has been restored to the countryside, charges against dozens of activists have been dropped, and he has embarked on meetings around the country, listening to grievances and promising reform, including term limits for his position” (Washington Post (6 May 2018) *After years of unrest, Ethiopians are riding an unlikely wave of hope. Will it last?*).

This document also states that:

“In contrast to his predecessor, Abiy has strong popular support, which could give him leverage against elements of the establishment that might oppose changes. A reorganization of the security services, which critics maintain are dominated by the Tigrayans — who formed the backbone of the military after they overthrew the communist regime in 1991 — has yet to take place, however. They were left untouched in a recent cabinet reshuffle” (ibid).

A report issued in May 2018 by *Reuters* states:

“An exiled Ethiopian opposition party from the country’s restive Oromiya region said it had held talks with the government, a tentative step in its aim of returning to the political fold” (Reuters (14 May 2018) *Exiled Ethiopian opposition group holds talks with government*).

This document also states that:

“The ODF previously held lower level discussions with the government in 2015, but government officials declined to meet party leader Lencho Leta when he traveled to Ethiopia from his home in Norway for the talks. Oromos make up roughly a third of Ethiopia’s population of 100 million. Oromiya, which surrounds the capital Addis Ababa, has been plagued by violence since 2015, largely fueled by a sense of

political and economic marginalization among its young population. The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has been in power since 1991, when it took over from the Derg military regime. Abiy, who became prime minister in April, has told opposition leaders the country will strengthen a range of political and civil rights, in the latest sign he may be willing to push through reforms announced in the wake of violent protests" (ibid).

### **Information on the Oromo protests during October 2016 in Furi ,Oromia and regionally generally**

A report issued in October 2016 by *IRIN News* states:

"On Sunday evening, the bars of Addis Ababa were doing their usual brisk business. Just 50 kilometres south of the Ethiopian capital, in the picturesque volcanic lake town of Bishoftu, more than 100 people lay dead. About two million ethnic Oromo had turned up to celebrate a traditional cultural festival. But a deadly stampede ensued after police fired tear gas at protesters who were chanting anti-government slogans and throwing stones and bottles. Ethiopia is going through its most widespread and sustained protests since the ruling Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front came to power in 1991" (IRIN News (3 October 2016) *Is Ethiopia unravelling?*).

This document also states that:

"The Oromo are the country's largest ethnic group, constituting 35 percent of the country's nearly 100 million population. They have historically felt short-changed by successive regimes in Addis Ababa, and, initially, the unrest was confined to the Oromia Region" (ibid).

*BBC News* in October 2016 notes that:

"Ethiopia has declared a state of emergency following months of anti-government protests by members of the country's two largest ethnic groups. The Oromo and the Amhara make up about 60% of the population. They complain power is held by a tiny Tigrean elite. Violence has intensified since last Sunday when at least 55 people were killed in clashes between police and protesters at an Oromo festival" (BBC News (9 October 2016) *Ethiopia declares state of emergency amid protests*).

A report issued in October 2016 by *Amnesty International* notes that:

"Protests against the Ethiopian Government have been going on in Oromia region since November 2015. The proposed Addis Ababa City Integrated Development Master Plan triggered region-wide protests in Oromia, given that the Master Plan would excise land from Oromia and cause forced eviction of Oromo farmers. However, the protesters' demands have since evolved to demand the release of Oromo political prisoners, equality on ethnic grounds and accountability for human rights violations caused by the heavy-handed response of government security forces. Since the start of the protests in Oromia, the government arrested and charged Bekele Gerba, Deputy Chairperson of Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Dejene Tafa, Deputy General Secretary of OFC, and others under the Anti-terrorism Proclamation (ATP) legislation, which the Ethiopian Government typically uses to silence the political opposition, independent media and bloggers. The ATP defines terrorism so broadly that it punishes legitimate exercise of freedom of expression; and allows up to four months of pre-trial detention. People previously charged under

the ATP told Amnesty International that they had faced torture and other ill-treatment while in pre-trial detention. The Ethiopian Government has arrested and charged 135 Oromo politicians and activists under the ATP since the protests in Oromia began in 2015. The security forces have also killed hundreds of protesters, wounded thousands and arbitrarily arrested tens of thousands, by using live ammunition, tear gas, and batons to disperse protests...The government announcement that it had cancelled the Master Plan in January 2016 was not able to abate the protests. The tragedy that took place on 2 October 2016 in Bishoftu during the celebration of Irreecha...further escalated the situation in Oromia, ending the relative calm since mid-September 2016" (Amnesty International (18 October 2016) *Ethiopia: Reform Only Feasible Way Out Of Mounting Crisis*, p.2).

In November 2016 the *Rift Valley Institute* states in a report that:

"On 2 October the annual Oromo (Irreecha) cultural celebration in Bishoftu, 40 km south of Addis Ababa, descended into chaos, after protest groups took over the customary leaders' dais chanting political slogans. Security responded with live arms fire creating a mass stampede in which there were 50 fatalities according to official statements; opposition groups claimed hundreds died. Following Bishoftu, both Oromo and Amhara regions saw well organized gangs attack and destroy foreign-owned or party-linked farms and factories. Special forces sent to quell protests were also attacked" (Rift Valley Institute (November 2016) *A Year of Protests in Ethiopia*, p.2).

In February 2017 *Amnesty International* states in a report that:

"Tensions in Oromia and Amhara Regions escalated following a stampede during the Irreecha festival...on 2 October 2016 that resulted in the death of at least 55 people. The cause of the stampede and the number of casualties are contested. The government blames 'anti-peace' protestors for triggering the stampede, while Oromo activists claim that government security forces triggered it when they fired tear gas canisters and shot live ammunition into the crowd. Subsequently, fresh protests broke out in a number of locations in Oromia Region during the 'week of rage' declared by Oromo activists. Some protests became violent as protestors attacked foreign and local businesses, farms and vehicles, especially those near Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian government also alleges that the protestors attacked and killed security forces in some districts of Oromia Region. There were also peaceful protests in parts of Amhara region following the Irreecha stampede" (Amnesty International (13 February 2017) *Ethiopia: Draconian State of Emergency Measures*, p.2).

A report published in September 2017 by *Human Rights Watch* points out that:

"On October 2, 2016 scores of people, possibly hundreds, died at the annual Irreecha cultural festival of Ethiopia's ethnic Oromo people, following a stampede triggered by security forces' use of teargas and discharge of firearms in response to an increasingly restive crowd. Some died after falling into a deep open trench, others drowned in the nearby lake while fleeing security forces, and witnesses told Human Rights Watch that others were shot by security forces. Many were trampled after armed security forces blocked main roads exiting the site, leaving those fleeing with few options. Irreecha is the most important cultural festival of Ethiopia's 35 million ethnic Oromos who gather to celebrate the end of the rainy season and welcome the harvest season. Massive crowds, estimated in the millions, gather each year at Bishoftu, 40 kilometers southeast of Addis Ababa every year" (Human Rights Watch

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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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