



Ethiopia – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 15 July 2013

Any information on relations between the Oromo opposition party and the TPLF.

The 2013 Freedom House report on Ethiopia, in a section titled “Political Rights and Civil Liberties”,

“The government tends to favor Tigrayan ethnic interests in economic and political matters, and the EPRDF is dominated by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front. Repression of the Oromo and ethnic Somalis, and government attempts to co-opt their parties into subsidiaries of the EPRDF, have fueled nationalism in both the Oromia and Ogaden regions.” (Freedom House (9 May 2013) *Freedom in the World 2013 – Ethiopia*)

A Refugee Review Tribunal of Australia country advice document, in response to the request “Please provide information on any oppression by the Ethiopian Government of Oromo people including discrimination in education and employment.”, states:

“Although the Oromo form the largest single ethnic group in Ethiopia, ethnic Tigrawis have dominated the institutions of power since 1991. Despite Ethiopia's appearance as a democratic federation of titular homelands, the ruling Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has monopolised government using a combination of force and corrupt electoral practices. As the largest ethnic group, with the most organised opposition, Oromos are the most politically suppressed and suffer a high level of human rights abuses. While the EPDRF has lifted many cultural restrictions on the Oromo, employment in the public service and enrolment in state-run education institutions remains conditional on EPRDF patronage and therefore loyalty. Disloyal Oromos frequently lose government jobs and are expelled from schools and universities.” (Refugee Review Tribunal of Australia (23 March 2010) *Ethiopia – ETH36379 – Oromos – Education – Employment – Opposition groups*, p.1)

This document also states:

“Included in the EPRDF coalition is the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO); however, many suspect that the OPDO is part of a façade of ethnic and political inclusiveness. The International Crisis Group (ICG) reports that most Oromo view the OPDO as a construct and puppet of the TPLF, a view the ICG largely shares; '[t]he TPLF established the OPDO as the vanguard Oromo party in 1990.' The general consensus is that Oromos in the OPDO have protected their own interests rather than supporting the economic development and cultural rights of the Oromo. A number of genuine Oromo political parties do exist, many of which attempt to participate in local and national elections.” (ibid, p.2)

An International Crisis Group report, in a section titled “From the Transitional Government to the Federal Democratic Republic (1991-1994)”, states:

“The TPLF had prepared for national leadership by establishing the EPRDF as an umbrella of ethno-national fronts in 1989. That coalition included the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (EPDM), the Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and the Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Front (SEPDF), but from the onset, the TPLF was its dominant political force.” (International Crisis Group (4 September 2009) *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and its Discontents*, p.4)

See also Footnote 26 in this report which states:

“The TPLF established the OPDO as the vanguard Oromo party in 1990. Its members are mostly drawn from former Derg prisoners of war.” (ibid, p.4)

In a section titled “Oromiya region” this report states:

“With creation of the region, Oromo national identity was territorialised for the first time, but many Oromos are unhappy with their political and economic situation. Oromo nationalists argue that their ethnic group continues to be exploited, and they draw an unbroken line from oppressive Abyssinian rule under Emperor Menelik in the nineteenth century to the EPRDF. A frequent complaint is that the Tigrayan-led regime plunders the region. Oromiya’s rich resources – coffee, agricultural produce, livestock and water – are said to be siphoned off by the federal government. Such views are shared by many politically aware Oromos, including members of the ruling OPDO.” (ibid, p.26)

This section also states:

“A recurrent government method to silence critics is to accuse them of being OLF, OPC (formerly ONC) or OFDM members. Reporting OLF sympathisers buys favours from local administrators, including kebele court judgments in property disputes. Unsurprisingly, Oromiya has the country’s highest level of reported human rights violations. An atmosphere of suspicion, intimidation and fear prevails.” (ibid, p.26)

Also published by the International Crisis Group is a report which, in a section titled “Unfulfilled Federalism, Rising Ethnic and Religious Discontent”, states:

“The case of the main ethnic group, the Oromo, exemplifies the deep dissatisfaction. The TPLF eliminated or defeated all the parties with genuine constituencies in the community, both those with an armed secessionist agenda and those that acted within constitutional limits. The assertion is that the parties in the EPRDF properly address their expectations, but most Oromo maintain these have been coopted, deeply corrupted and will not challenge the TPLF’s central role or truly represent their ethnic or regional constituencies.” (International Crisis Group (22 August 2012) *Ethiopia After Meles*, p.6)

A Human Rights Watch report states:

“The OFDM and OPC are legally registered opposition parties. However both parties and their members have faced repeated harassment and intimidation. In March, the authorities arrested more than 100 members of the two parties during mass roundups. Those arbitrarily arrested and detained included former members of parliament, long-serving party officials, and candidates in the 2010 regional and parliamentary elections.” (Human Rights Watch (1 September 2011) *Ethiopia: Free Detained Opposition Leaders*)

A report published by Amnesty International, in a section titled “Arrests of Oromo Opposition Members: March/April & August/September”, states:

“Between 200 and 300 ethnic Oromos were arrested in March and April in widespread sweeps in the Oromia region and in Addis Ababa.¹ Arrests were reported from towns across the region, including Moyale, Jimma, Harar and Nekemte. At least 89 members of the two largest Oromo political parties – the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) and Oromo People’s Congress (OPC) were among those arrested. Many of them had been members of the national parliament or of the Oromia regional assembly from 2005 to 2010, and had also stood unsuccessfully for re-election in the 2010 general elections. For instance Berhanu Emiru, arrested in April, is a member of the Executive Committee of the OFDM, and a high school physics teacher. Berhanu campaigned in the 2010 elections and authored documents such as statements and media articles for the party. 32 of those arrested, including Asfaw Ngasso, Gutu Mulesa and Mengesha Tolesa, were OPC candidates in the 2010 elections. Asfaw Ngasso and Gutu Mulesa were also OPC members of parliament between 2005 and 2010. A number of youth and student members of the two parties, including a 17 year old girl who was a supporter of the OFDM, were also arrested in the March and April sweeps.” (Amnesty International (16 December 2011) *Dismantling Dissent Intensified Crackdown on Free Speech in Ethiopia*, p.7)

This report also states:

“A second round-up of Oromo opposition parties’ members occurred in late August and early September with at least 20 people being arrested. Among those arrested were nine OFDM and OPC members including Bekele Gerba, an English teacher at Addis Ababa University and deputy chairman of the OFDM, and Olbana Lelisa, an OPC party official. Both men had met with Amnesty International delegates just days before their arrests. All the OPC and OFDM members were arrested on suspicion that they were members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), an armed insurgent group which was proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the Ethiopian parliament in June 2011. Members of the Oromo political opposition have been charged with OLF membership countless times in the past.” (ibid, p.8)

In a section titled “Profile of Those Arrested” (subsection headed “The OPC and OFDM Arrests”), this report states:

“The accusation of supporting the OLF is frequently used to silence members of the Oromo political opposition. Countless members of Oromo opposition parties have been arrested and prosecuted on this basis in the past. For example, in February 2010, during the run-up to general elections, the OPC announced that more than 150 party officials had been arrested in less than five months, all for allegedly supporting the OLF. Many of the members of the

OPC and OFDM political parties arrested during 2011 reported a long history of harassment in the course of their political activities, particularly during election campaigning for the 2010 elections. Several members of both parties who were arrested in March and April reported that in the weeks before their arrests they had received phone calls warning them that they would be arrested if they did not join the ruling party.” (ibid, p.15)

A section titled “Torture and Other Forms of Illtreatment” states:

“Many of the members of Oromo political parties who were detained in March and April were arrested in various locations across the Oromia region and transferred to Addis Ababa, some from distances of 200 to 300 kilometers. A number of detainees now released, and family members of detainees still in custody, told Amnesty International that the detainees arrested in western Oromia were taken first to Ambo, a town on the way to Addis Ababa. The detainees were temporarily detained in Ambo in an unofficial place of detention, where they were badly beaten. Detention in un-gazetted places of detention puts detainees at greater risk of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Some further OPC and OFDM members were arbitrarily detained for varying lengths of time in other unofficial places of detention around the same period. One party member told Amnesty International that he had been held for three weeks in an unofficial place of detention, which he believed to be in Addis Ababa, where he was repeatedly beaten and whipped with metal wire. He showed Amnesty International deep scars in several places on his body which he said resulted from the beatings. He was hospitalised after his release due to the serious injuries he had sustained while in detention. A number of the detainees complained in court during the pre-trial hearings that they had been subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment in Maikelawi. OFDM official Berhanu Emiru, arrested in April, complained in a pre-trial hearing that he had been repeatedly beaten and subject to inhuman and degrading treatment in Maikelawi. The court reportedly refused to consider his complaint.” (ibid, p.28)

An IRIN News report states:

“Interviews with new arrivals in Yemen reveal that certain ethnic groups are harassed and suffer discrimination by local government officials in Ethiopia because of their perceived allegiance to rebel armed groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and even established opposition parties like the Oromo People’s Congress. Earlier this year, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the authorities were carrying out mass arrests of ethnic Oromo Ethiopians, whom they alleged were members of the banned OLF. The Danish Refugee Council report said 47 percent of new Ethiopian arrivals registered in Yemen in 2010 were of Oromo ethnicity. ‘You don’t even have to be an OLF sympathiser - any form of communication with someone who might have a link with the OLF could be enough to get you arrested, and this is what is very worrying,’ Laetitia Bader, a researcher with HRW, told IRIN.” (IRIN News (22 November 2011) *Ethiopia: Cautionary migration tales are no deterrent*)

A Voice of America News report on the arrest of two leading Oromo politicians states:

“Bekele and Olbana had been considered among the brightest of the young generation of politicians being groomed to take over following the 2010 electoral disaster, when the opposition was virtually shut out of parliament. Bekele had been named deputy chairman and external relations chief for the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM), and Olbana held a similar post in the Oromo People's Congress. Bekele, an English instructor at Addis Ababa University, was also on the executive board of the main opposition bloc Medrek. The men were arrested last August after meeting with a visiting delegation from the Amnesty International rights group, which was later expelled from the country. Along with seven co-defendants, Bekele and Olbana had also assisted a BBC news crew that been investigating allegations that Ethiopia used billions of dollars in development aid as a tool for political repression. The government strongly denied the report, calling it irresponsible.” (Voice of America News (8 January 2012) *Ethiopian Politicians on Trial for Terrorism*)

See also the 2013 US Department of State country report which, in a section titled “Political Prisoners and Detainees”, states:

“Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa, two well-known political opposition figures from the Oromo ethnic group, as well as seven other individuals, were convicted under the criminal code of conspiracy to overthrow the government and incite unrest. Bekele was sentenced to eight years in prison; Olbana was sentenced to 13 years. A separate trial of 69 members of Oromo political opposition parties, charged in 2011 under the criminal code with ‘attacking the political or territorial integrity of the state,’ remained ongoing at year’s end.” (US Department of State (19 April 2013) *2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Ethiopia*, p.10)

In “Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government” (paragraph headed “Political Parties”) this report states:

“During the year, there were credible reports teachers and other government workers had their employment terminated if they belonged to opposition political parties. According to Oromo opposition groups, the Oromia regional government continued to threaten to dismiss opposition party members, particularly teachers, from their jobs.” (ibid, p.22)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit 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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