

Civil & Political Rights

Submitted by: The Advocates for Human Rights, and United Oromo Voices.

MECHANISM

Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

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Summary: In the last 4 years, Ethiopia has undergone two declared states of emergency and has undertaken major reforms within governmental structures. Although Ethiopia recently elected a reform-minded Prime Minister, there are still issues of arbitrarily arrest, detention, and torture of ethnic minority and political opposition groups.

The government's rhetoric supports forgiveness without accountability.

- "Since becoming Prime Minister in April 2018, PM Abiy Ahmed has made major political reforms such as ending the state of emergency, releasing thousands of political prisoners, ending the war with Eritrea, and appointing women to half the ministerial posts.
- Although these reforms are instrumental in facilitating ethnic reconciliation, the Prime Minister's emphasis on forgiveness for previous human rights violations from the government is not promoted along with accountability.
- In 2017, the government refused the independent and impartial investigations into human rights violations by the OHCHR, and this impunity has been upheld in the current government.
- In June 2018, the Prime Minister let go of the army chief of staff and the Director General of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) with ceremonies although both of them have been implicated in severe human rights violations since the ruling party's rise to power.

The states of emergency limited the right to assembly and political association.

- The major ethnicities in Ethiopia are the Oromo (34%), Amhara (27%), Somali (6%), and Tigray (6%).
 - In November 2015 the ethnic tension intensified when peaceful political protesters marched due to the political, economic and cultural marginalization of the Oromo group.
- In October 2016, the government retaliated with a six-month state of emergency which stalled any form of group assembly, and closing of public services by anti-government protesters.
- The government increased its restriction in 2017 by intermittently blocking internet access, and banning diaspora television that challenges the government's rhetoric.

- Until June of 2018, opposition groups such as the Members the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogden National Liberation front (ONLF) were labeled terrorist groups.

The government arbitrarily arrests and detains citizens.

- The states of emergency declared in 2015 and 2016 have also given the police wide discretion to arrest and detain individuals without a court warrant, to restrict people's movement, and to curtail freedoms of speech.
- During the second state of emergency over 21,000 people were arbitrarily detained and sent to "rehabilitation camps."
- The government denied access to the United Nation's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on five different occasions, including 2015.

Extrajudicial Killings have not been investigated and prosecuted.

- The Ethiopian Somali Liyu Police, which is a security force of the Somali region, continues to enjoy impunity for their alleged extrajudicial killings in 2017.
- The heavily militarized police forces in Oromia and Amhara regions have also opened fire during different anti-governmental protests in 2016 and 2017 which has left hundreds dead.

Political Prisoners are held in subhuman detention conditions.

- In 2017, Human Rights Watch deemed the prison conditions in Ethiopia as life-threatening due to the systemic torture, gross overcrowding, and poor sanitary conditions.
- After international pressure, the government closed down Maekelawi and Ogaden in March and September 2018 respectively, releasing the political prisoners without any restitution.
- The government still maintains unofficial detention centers throughout the country, including Dedessa, Bir Sheleko, Tolay, Horamat, and Blate.

Recommendations

- Initiate dialogue with civil society within Ethiopia and in the diaspora with a view to establishing a transitional justice mechanism consistent with best practices.
- Ensure accountability for perpetrators of gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity.
- Guarantee freedom of opinion and expression by ending surveillance, eliminating threats, and ending arbitrary arrests of political dissidents.
- Establish independent mechanisms for reporting and investigations of unlawful detention, torture, and inhumane treatment at the hands of police and security forces.
- Establish a mechanism to protect, in law and in practice, the rights of all ethnic groups from attacks and violations of human rights and freedoms.