

Focus of the Month: THE ETHNIC PROBLEM

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Based on the 1984 Population and Housing Census)

Transitional Government of Ethiopia

Office of the Population and Housing Census Commission Addis Abeba - Ethiopia. December 1991

Numerical and percentage distribution of Ethiopia's population by ethnic groups

Ethnic groups	number	percentage	Ethnic groups	number	percentage
Adere	29518	0.069	Kewama	263	0.001
Afar	58312	1.368	Kimant	164950	0.397
Agew	489834	1.149	Koira	67491	0.164
Agnya	30499	0.072	Konso	91183	0.222
Alaba	83839	0.197	Kontta	39305	0.092
Amara	12055250	28.288	Kunama	99999	0.235
Arbore	7457	0.017	Mabal	715	0.002
Argoba	51877	0.122	Male	30887	0.072
Ari	109124	0.256	Malo	58039	0.136
Ayda	19221	0.045	Mao	26087	0.061
Basketo	45471	0.107	Mean	50465	0.118
Beja	124432	0.292	Mesengo	16170	0.038
Bencho	123034	0.292	Miye	1314	0.003
Benisangul	7581	0.018	Mocha	57505	0.135
Berta	4072	0.010	Murle	830	0.002
Bilen	88453	0.208	Mursi	2976	0.007
Borena	1 58759	0.373	Nao	12177	0.029
Burji	43259	0.102	Nara	49229	0.116
Busa	8577	0.020	Nidash	829	0.002
Chara	13051	0.031	Nuwer	27827	0.065
Coma	3966	0.009	Oromo	12387664	29.068
Dami	2128	0.005	Rashida	6799	0.016
Desanech	32639	0.077	Saho	144485	0.339
Dizi	22329	0.052	Shankila	38731	0.091
Domete	275552	0.64	Sheko	30763	0.072
Dorze	43924	0.103	Sheta	606	0.001
Fakenkum	1397	0.003	Shinasha	20002	0.047
Felasha	34056	0.080	Sidama	1261721	2.961
Gamil	2888	0.007	Somalie	1613394	3.786
Gamo	463933	1.089	Suri	8839	0.021
Gangile	2772	0.007	Surma	8412	0.020
Gebato	775	0.002	Tigrawai	4149697	9.737
Gedeo	455408	1.069	Tigre	683085	1.603
Gewada	20122	0.047	Timbaro	57938	0.136
Gidole	31048	0.073	Tsemay	10737	0.025
Gnangatom	6087	0.014	Undu	1491	0.003
Gobat	1733	0.004	Wage	2142	0.005
Goffa	154041	0.361	Welaita	1092958	2.565
Guagu	953	0.002	Weyto	3816	0.009
Guji	481442	1.130	Yemisa	115906	0.272
Gumz	33833	0.079	Zeyse	17843	0.042
Gurage	1855905	4.355	Zilman	5318	0.012
Hadya	643512	1.150			
Hammer	26759	0.063	Naturalized	7563	0.018
Jebelawi	44129	0.104	Different Ethnic group*	47797	0.112
Kebina	19364	0.045			
Kechem	5471	0.013	Others**	329307	0.773
Keffa	443209	1.040	Foreigners	9041	0.021
Kembata	432819	1.016	Not Stated	133903	0.314

* Different Ethnic groups. This heading refers to persons whose parents are from different ethnic groups and don't want to identify themselves with either.

** Others. This heading refers to ethnic groups different from those precoded in the 1984 population and housing census.

1. HOW MANY ETHNIC GROUPS IN ETHIOPIA? 91 PLUS «OTHERS»

A detailed list of ethnic groups residing in Ethiopia was provided in the census enumerators' instruction manual which identified 91 ethnic groups. However, in the course of the census, small groups, other than those precoded in the 1984 population and housing census were discovered. These groups, which together accounted for 0.8% of the country's total population, were referred to as «others».

In addition, some 50,000 Ethiopians with parents from different ethnic groups refused to identify themselves with either and were classified as «different ethnic groups». The small number of people officially classified in this category does not mean, however, that the country is composed of «ethnically pure» communities. With the notable exception of the Afars and the Somalis, all the other groups have always practiced inter-ethnic marriages. The number of Ethiopians who, with the rise of ethnic consciousness fanned by the EPRDF, somewhat jokingly refer to themselves as «half casts» runs literally into the millions. This reality and the problems it entails came to the forefront when EPRDF introduced its own version of the notorious «population registration act» of apartheid South Africa and decreed that all voters identity cards should indicate clearly the ethnic origin of card carrying nationals.



Leaving aside the question of number, which as we see has no clear answer, we may note another important aspect of the ethnic make-up in Ethiopia. The data provided by the census clearly showed that there is considerable difference in the number of

people in each ethnic group. The difference in size goes all the way from the largest group - that of the Oromos, who, with a total of 12,387,644 accounted for 29.068% of the total population of Ethiopia, to that of the Kewama, who, with a bare 283 amounted, to 0.001% of the country's population.

2. THE PATTERN OF DISTRIBUTION: OROMOS AND AMARAS 57% OF THE POPULATION

The distribution of «major ethnic groups» (ie ethnic groups with 20,000 or more persons) showed that out of the 91 groups identified, only 56 could be identified as major groups. A closer look at this also showed that of those 56, only 16 groups accounted for more than 1% of the population (400,000 persons and above). The seven ethnic groups with a population of one million and more were identified as Oromo, Amara, Tigrawi, Gurage, Somali, Sidama and Wollayita.

Then one has the two dominant ethnic groups: the Oromos (29%) and Amaras (28%) who together account for 57% of the country's population. They are followed by the Tigrawi (at the time of the 1984 census this group included Tigreans in Eritrea (9.7%)*, the Gurage (4.4%) Somalis (3.8%) Sidama (3.0%) and Wolayita (2.6%).

3. WHO LIVES WHERE? AMARAS DOMINANT IN URBAN CENTRES, GURAGES THE MOST URBANIZED

The Oromos formed the largest proportion (30.4%) of the rural population of Ethiopia. They are followed by the Amaras with 26.2% of the country's rural population, the Tigrawi (9.1%), Somalis (4.2%) and the Gurage (3.7%).

In rural areas, the distribution of the population by ethnic groups is therefore almost similar to that of the distribution for the entire country. When it comes to urban areas, the picture is different. A full 44.5% of urban residents in Ethiopia are Amaras. They are followed by the Oromos who account for 18.7% of the country's urban population, the Tigrawi (15.5%) and the Gurage (9.5%).

* For more details on Eritrean independence and the ethnic problem in Ethiopia, see back cover).

The data also showed that the most urbanized ethnic group in the country is the Gurage with 25% of the group living in urban areas. This is followed by the Amara and Tigrawi (18% each), the Oromos (7.5%), the Wolayita (6.4%), the Somalis (2.2%) and the Sidamas (1.4%).

4. WHO SPEAKS WHAT? AMHARIC THE MOST WIDELY SPOKEN LANGUAGE

According to the classification based on "language usually spoken at home", the census showed that Amharigna was the most dominant language and was «usually spoken at home» by 32% of Ethiopians. Oromigna came second with 30%, followed by Tigrigna, Somaligna, Guragegna and Sidamigna with 9.5%, 3.9%, 3.3% and 3% respectively.

Further analysis of the data revealed that the most dominant language in rural Ethiopia was Oromigna «usually spoken at home» by 33% of Ethiopians in rural areas. This is followed by Amharigna (27.2%).

In urban areas, the majority (67.4%) of the population speak Amharigna at home. The data also revealed that 13.5 and 10.9 per cent of the urban population speak Tigrigna and Oromigna at home. Among the major languages usually spoken at home, the most urbanized is the Amharigna speaking group.

5. THE PLACE OF AMARIGNA IN ETHIOPIA

While pledging to ensure equality among Ethiopia's different languages, both Mengistu's and EPRDF's constitutions recognize Amharigna as the «working language» of the country. This is due to the fact that centuries of intercourse between the different ethnic groups has made Amharigna the Lingua Franca of Ethiopia.

According to the 1984 census, the 12,055,250 Amaras accounted for 28% of the population while the number of persons who usually spoke Amharigna at home rose to 13,528,232 or 33% of the population. This means that at that time, some one and half million non-Amaras usually spoke Amharigna at home. This however does not give the whole picture concerning the place and importance of Amharigna in Ethiopia.

In fact many more Ethiopians speak Amharigna (or for that matter Oromigna) than is suggested by the

data collected on the basis of «the language usually spoken at home». It is for example very common for Amaras born and brought up in Oromo regions to «usually speak Amharigna at home» and use Oromigna outside their homes. Likewise the figure of 33% does not include non-Amara Ethiopians who usually speak their own language at home and use Amharigna in their professional, economic or social intercourse outside their homes. This is particularly the established pattern in urban areas.

It is interesting to note that in rural areas, people, whatever their ethnic origin, usually speak at home the language of the predominant ethnic group in the region. If we take the case of Oromigna for example, the number of persons in rural areas «usually speaking Oromigna at home» is 12,281,353 while the Oromo population in rural areas is only 11,477,320. This means that there are some 800,000 non Oromos in rural Ethiopia who have adopted Oromigna as their main language of communication even at home.

The picture is quite different when we come to urban areas. Here, people tend to drop the use of their mother tongue and switch to Amharigna. In most cases they adopt Amharigna as a language of communication. While the percentage of Amaras in urban centers was 44%, 67% of all urban residents «usually spoke Amharigna at home». If we look again at the example of the Oromo, we see that whereas in rural areas there were more Oromigna-speaking people than there were Oromos, in urban centers, the number of Oromigna speaking people was less than the number of Oromos living in cities and towns. There were in 1984 some 910,000 Oromos living in urban centers. But the number of urbanized Oromos «usually speaking Oromigna at home» was only 529,747. This means that about a third of Oromos living in urban areas did not usually speak Oromigna at home and had probably switched to Amharigna which is the Lingua Franca of urban areas. This holds true for all ethnic groups in urban areas. If we take the Gurage for example, we see that out of 463,798 Gurage living in urban areas, only 70,159 «usually speak Guragegna at home».

From the data provided by the 1984 census and a closer scrutiny of the country's realities it can be reasonably argued that in addition to the 33% of the Ethiopians who usually speak Amharigna at home, some 10 to 15% more speak or understand Amharigna.

Given this pattern of distribution of languages, it is not difficult to see why many Ethiopians are opposed to TPLF's simplistic approach to the ethnic problem in the country which resulted in the creation of regions based on the criteria of ethnicity alone. The new administrative map of Ethiopia has created «enclaves» in all the regions. These are *not* Amara, but *Amharigna speaking* enclaves. In fact, one has as many of these as there are urban centres in Ethiopia. A comprehensive democratic solution to the ethnic problem in the country will surely have to reconsider TPLF's map which, in any case, was not drawn to solve the country's ethnic problem but rather to stir up tension between the peoples of this country.

6. THE RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION

The two main religions in Ethiopia are Orthodox Christianity and Islam

Christians: 61% of the Population

After the conversion of the Emperor Ezana by a Syrian monk in 375 AD, Ethiopia adopted Christianity as the state religion. The country followed the patriarch of Alexandria in the scission of the Christian world after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. From that time up to the 1974 revolution, the Orthodox Church - whose patriarch was an Egyptian appointed by the Patriarch of Alexandria until 1950 - was the country's official church.

According to data provided by the 1984 census, 61% of Ethiopians were Christians. Of those, 57% were Orthodox, 5.5% Protestants and 0.98% Catholics. The numerical and percentage distribution of Christians by rural / urban areas was as follows: while 50.42% of the rural population of the country were Orthodox Christians, close to 75% of urban dwellers were followers of this faith. While the rural/urban distribution of Catholics was more or less even (0.99% for rural areas and 0.99% for urban areas), it was clear from the data that Protestantism was more of a rural phenomenon. 6.02% of the rural population of the country (2,006,635 Ethiopians) were Protestant while in urban areas the number of Protestants was only 86,736 or 1.78% of the population.

Muslims: 32.9%

As was the case for Christianity, Ethiopians on the Abyssinian plateau were among the first peoples to

convert to Islam. The first contacts between Christian Ethiopia and Islam, which in the opinion of all historians were very cordial and friendly, date from the time of the Prophet and took place under circumstances which were difficult, to say the least, for the Prophet's early followers. «Go to Ethiopia. You will find a sovereign under whose authority no one is persecuted. It is a virtuous country where God will relieve you from your suffering». This was what the Prophet advised to his early followers who came to Ethiopia as refugees to escape persecution in ... Mecca. The conversion of Ethiopians began as early as 615 A.D. when the first refugees fleeing anti-Muslim persecution in Arabia arrived in the country.

The centuries that followed were, however, marked by intermittent conflicts which came to a head in the 16th century with the anti-Christian campaign of Ahmed «the left handed»

which was followed by massive forced conversion of Ethiopians of the Abyssinian plateau. The terrible trials of this period were to affect the position of Islam in Ethiopia for centuries to come. Ethiopian nationalism, which from this time on was more than ever equated with Orthodox Christianity, relegated Muslims to the status of second-class citizens to such an extent that in some areas they were not permitted to own land. It was only with the 1974 revolution - and the separation of Church and State, that measures were taken to guarantee equality of religious creed. The degree of equality of Christians and Muslims in post-revolutionary Ethiopia is such that it is the only country in the region where Christmas and Mawlid (holiday marking the birth of the Prophet) are celebrated on the same footing.

According to the 1984 census, the number of Muslims in the country was 12,569,995 or 32.9% of the population.

No figures were available concerning the distribution of religion by ethnic groups. It can however be said that the two main ethnic groups which compose Abyssinia (the Amaras and Tigrawi) are largely Christians whereas for the Afars and Somalis the dominant and essentially only religion is Islam. There are important communities of Muslims and Christians in all the other major ethnic groups. It is generally estimated that for the Oromos, the proportion of Christians - Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant - is estimated at a third of the Oromo population.

TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS: Traditional religious groups accounted for 5.8% of the population of Ethiopia. The number of Ethiopians in this group who lived mainly in the South and Southwestern areas of the country was 2,213,665.

II. THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

The ethnic problem referred to by the country's democratic forces as the question of nationalities, has been one of the most debated issues in Ethiopian politics. To give our readers a brief background to the problem we are reproducing extracts from the «Working document» prepared for the National Conference on Peace and Reconciliation in Ethiopia held in Addis Abeba from December 18 to 22, 1993.

The document is important not only for its correct analysis of the question of nations and nationalities but also because it is the only document to date which is prepared and endorsed by representatives of seven major ethnic based and interethnic democratic organizations.*

«Ethiopia is a country of many nations and nationalities. Our dream of building a country where its people live in unity and equality presupposes the recognition of this fact. The realization of this genuine objective of unity and equality of nations and nationalities has been frustrated in the past by the feudal regime that long prevailed in Ethiopia, the dictatorial rule of the Derg that followed and by the transition process we are currently in.» The document then goes on to an assessment of the problem as it evolved over the last 30 years by stressing the link between the feudal economic order and the question of nationalities.

«When the Ethiopian Student Movement raised the question of land as far back as thirty years ago, it underlined that the feudal landholding system was the root cause of not only degradation of Ethiopia's peasantry, but also that of the domination of their cultural, linguistic and religious rights. This was precisely why the movement articulated that the question of land and that of nations and nationalities were inseparable.»

Although a superficial view of the 1974 revolution tends to insist only on its negative and violent aspects, the seven organizations provided a sober analysis of the revolutionary process by pointing to its considerable achievement and the contribution it towards a democratic solution of the question of nationalities.

«It is very well known that February revolution generated massive support from the peasantry of the oppressed nationalities because of the land

proclamation that abolished the feudal order. Although the revolution lost track and ended in demonic dictatorship and tragedy, the struggle and sacrifices paid had not been in vain. The struggle involved democratic forces from all nationalities who worked hand in hand without regard to differences in nationality. This struggle and sacrifice has abolished the underlying basis of national oppression in Ethiopia and thus created a conducive environment to cooperate and join hand for the struggle towards achievement of equality and unity.»

This «conducive environment» created by the revolution vanished with the rise of Mengistu's dictatorship. The demise of the DERG did not help create the democratic environment without which no solution of the ethnic problem in Ethiopia could be reasonably envisaged. This problem in fact remained one of the major concerns because, as in the days of Haile Selassie and Mengistu, the basic democratic rights of all the peoples of Ethiopia continued to be denied by the present government:

«The reason why the national question has become one of the major problems of serious concern in our country is the fact that democracy is denied to the entire people. Therefore our primary objective should be to struggle for the realization of a democratic system in Ethiopia.»

What is the proposed solution?

The solution to the ethnic problem in Ethiopia as proposed by the seven signatories of the document and later endorsed by the National Conference for Peace and Reconciliation in Ethiopia held in Addis Ababa in December 1993 can be summarized as follows:

1. *The need for a united struggle for a democratic system*: It is only on the basis and within the framework of a democratic constitutional order which guarantees individual human rights, the rights of all ethnic groups and the democratic liberties of all Ethiopians that a solution to the ethnic problem in Ethiopia can come about. In order to achieve this, the seven signatories affirm «Our primary objective should be to struggle for the realization of a democratic system in Ethiopia».

2. *The need to recognize the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination*: This recognition is seen as a prerequisite not only for

(Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front - ARDUF, Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF), Ethiopian Medhin Democratic Party (Medhin), Multi-national Congress Party (MNCP), Oromo Liberation Front - OLF, Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Coalition (SEPDC), Tigray Tigriny Ethiopia (TTE)

forging unity of struggle for a democratic order, but also as the basis for equality and unity which the seven organizations say is «a genuine and legitimate sentiment shared by all Ethiopians and is beneficial to our goal of developing and consolidating democracy».

3. *The need for democratic dialogue involving all the peoples of Ethiopia* to define the political and constitutional framework for a united and democratic country: the seven organizations declare that «As the unity of Ethiopia's people will be based, built and developed upon the recognition of this right, it should be made crystal clear that it is the Ethiopian people themselves and no others who should decide upon the appropriate structure of state pursuant to democratic norms».

4. *The need to empower ethnic groups*: Elaborating on these general principles defined by the seven major ethnic and multi-ethnic organizations, the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE), in its April 1995 Manifesto «For a New Democratic Beginning» reaffirmed its determination to work towards a democratic solution to the problem and vowed to struggle for a Democratic Constitution which among other things should allow for the empowerment of nations and nationalities «to decide on all matters of their special concern».

5. *The need to guarantee full and equal participation in all matters of common concern*: This is also stressed by the CAFPDE's document which rejects the EPRDF's Constitution which «Although it claims to have created a federal structure that enables the participation of nations and nationalities on decisions of common interest, does not allow in reality the Federal Council, one of the two chambers of the Federal Parliament, to fully participate in the law-making process».

III. WHY IS EPRDF THE PROBLEM AND NOT THE SOLUTION?

What is EPRDF in the first place? This Front is only one among a host of «organizations» created and controlled by the Tigray People's Liberation Front. The TPLF itself is led by a small and extremely secretive organization called the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT) presided by Meles Zenawi. Member organizations of EPRDF are created by TPLF. The EPDM «representing» the Amaras came first. Then there was the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO). After coming to power, TPLF adopted what one foreign observer called the «PDO strategy». This consisted of creating a «People's Democratic Organization» for practically all the ethnic groups in the country. All these were then admitted as «member organizations» of EPRDF. While leadership of TPLF and EPRDF was in the

hands of Meles' Marxist Leninist League of Tigray, it was found necessary to associate all the «true believers» in a more disciplined and ideologically motivated group supposed to give leadership to a wider front. This led to the creation of the Ethiopian Marxist Leninist Force which later became the «Ethiopian Workers'» Revolutionary Party (EWRP) led by MLLT ... and Meles!

The creation of these and a host of other «organizations» which make Meles and the TPLF «look busier than an amoeba» should not make us lose sight of the essence of the political reality: As the ECONOMIST (May 6, 1995) rightly put it, «President Meles and his comrades are sophisticated leftists who in different times would have set up a repressive one-party state. They began as a Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray before forming the Tigray People's Liberation Front which led the northern rebellion. But as they grew in strength, and advanced south, they had to create new movements to gain credibility in the areas they now occupied ... Approaching the capital they formed the EPRDF, a classic umbrella movement made up of their shell organizations.»

It is these shells that, as parties, are now in appearance competing for votes. But at the center sits Mr. Meles and his Tigrean comrades. «Decentralizing» has meant dispersing opposition and holding on to the essentials of power - guaranteed ultimately by the Tigrean core of the army».

1. A democratic solution of the ethnic problem in Ethiopia can be achieved only through constitutional guarantees concerning the empowerment of the nations in their internal affairs and fair say in issues of global and national concerns. EPRDF's «Democratic Federation» built on the Soviet model neither empowers ethnic groups nor guarantees their democratic participation in the country's affairs. The fact that a host of «People's Democratic Organizations» supposedly «representing» their respective ethnic groups have joined EPRDF and that these organizations have assumed power in the regions does not mean empowerment of ethnic groups. «Power to EPRDF» is not «Power to the people» as a recent article by a Newsweek journalist claimed.

The «empowerment» of such «shell organizations» in the regions is not the democratic solution to the ethnic problem in Ethiopia. It can at best be compared to the British colonial policy of indirect rule. This is what an African human rights expert, Dr. Makau wa Mutua, a lawyer and project director at the Harvard Law School Human Rights Programme stressed in an article entitled «Ignoring the lessons of History»:

«Meles Zenawi has sought the perfection of the British colonial policy of «indirect rule» through which the imperial control over the «natives» would be exercised by their «kith and kin» ... What Meles has presented as the «devolution of real power» to previously oppressed groups is in fact little more than the substitution of Tigrean dictators for Amara hegemony».

2. A democratic solution of the ethnic problem in Ethiopia can be achieved only through equality of all ethnic groups in the country. The ethnic problem continues and will continue to bedevil Ethiopia because TPLF's policy rejects this obvious and basic prerequisite to a democratic solution and is instead geared towards the establishment of totalitarian rule by a minority ethnic group which now accounts for less than 6% of the population. This makes the so-called «one party rule» now unfolding in Ethiopia more pernicious and dangerous than an «ordinary» dictatorship. § First because an extremely sensitive and potentially explosive issue is used irresponsibly

for petty political ends. As Dr. Makau wa Mutua put it, *«TPLF's policy of regionalization - an attempt to create ethnically pure regions - seeks above all to officially coalesce ethnic identities by heightening the narrow and chauvinistic group consciousness already prevalent in the country while at the same time pitting the Oromo against the Amara, the Tigrean against the Somali, each group against every other group, and further polarizing political factions within each group on the basis of their collaboration with or rejection of TPLF's domination».*

Secondly, TPLF's «one party rule» is more dangerous than an «ordinary» dictatorship because there is clearly a deliberate attempt to use the people of Tigray by ostensibly presenting them as the privileged beneficiaries of TPLF's hold on the country. The hatred against Tigreans which this policy generates is then used to intimidate the peoples of Tigray into accepting TPLF not only as their «benefactor» but also as their protector against the rising anti-Tigrean sentiment in the country.

HUMAN RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT 1995

This report covers the period January to December 1994.

Several thousand suspected government opponents were detained during 1994. Many, including several journalists and opposition party activists tried and imprisoned for political offences, were prisoners of conscience. Over 5,000 alleged opponents of the Transitional Government detained without charge since 1992 were released. Trials on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity began in December against officials of the previous government. There were widespread allegations of torture. Scores of «disappearances» and extrajudicial executions of government opponents were reported. Two people were sentenced to death but there were no executions ...

Over 70 journalists of the independent press were arrested on account of articles criticizing the government. Many were repeatedly denied bail but eventually released provisionally; in May the Minister of Justice announced that 43 court cases were pending against journalists. Kefale Mammo, Chairman of the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFJA) was held for 19 days in April, apparently for contacting international human rights and media organizations. Several journalists were convicted under the Press Law (1992) and received prison terms, suspended prison terms or heavy fines. Tefera Asmare, editor of Ethiopis magazine was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in March for criticizing the government. He was a prisoner of conscience, as was Goshu Moges, editor of Tobia magazine, who was sentenced to six months' imprisonment in

October and released on bail pending appeal in December for publishing a letter from an imprisoned prominent government opponent, Professor Asrat Woldeyes, saying he did not expect a fair trial (see below). Tasfaye Tadesse, a lawyer and human rights activist, was arrested in July, apparently in connection with an article in a magazine to which he was legal adviser. He was held for four months without charge. Hundreds of opposition party members were detained on account of their peaceful political activities.

Throughout the year there were widespread arrests in eastern Ethiopia of members of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), an ethnic Somali party. Many of those held seemed to be prisoners of conscience who were not involved in armed opposition by ONLF militias. Hajio Dama, chair of the Ogadenian Women's Democratic Alliance, was one of many people arrested in January further to the ONLF's call for an independence referendum for the region. She was released in February with serious medical problems resulting from ill-treatment. In May, government troops detained the regional assembly President Hassan Jirreh Kalinle, and other elected members. The authorities alleged they were arrested for embezzlement of public funds. Hassan Jirreh Kalinle was released provisionally in July. Many ONLF supporters were still detained incommunicado by the army at the end of the year, including Ibado Abdullahi, a woman poet, and Haji Abdinur Sheikh Mumin, Iman of Degabur mosque.