



Ethiopia – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 1 December 2009

Any information on an attempted coup in Ethiopia in May 2009. Who was involved? Any army personnel?

An article from the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation* refers to an alleged coup plot in May 2009 as follows:

“Ethiopian security forces have conducted a major operation in the last couple of days to arrest people alleged to have links with an attempted coup last week. The operation in various parts of the country, including army bases, reportedly netted police and army officers in Amhara region but authorities declined to comment on the issue. Several people were also arrested in the capital Addis Ababa. Last week, a security intelligence team raided homes of suspected individuals and arrested 40 people, including high-ranking military officials. Mr Bereket Simon, the minister for communication affairs, who was allegedly the target of an assassination plot, denied there was a coup plot, preferring to call it ‘the terror plot’ by ‘disgruntled individuals’ instead.” (Daily Nation (2 May 2009) *Ethiopia hunts down coup plot suspects in operation*)

A *BBC News* report on the arrest of alleged coup plotters states:

“Ethiopia's authorities say they have arrested 35 people who were allegedly plotting to overthrow the government. All are said to be members of Ginbot 7 (15 May), an opposition group based outside Ethiopia and led by the self-exiled politician Berhanu Nega. The Ethiopian government say the people arrested in Friday's raids fall into two groups: some were soldiers and others civil servants.” (BBC News (25 April 2009) *Ethiopia arrests 'coup plotters'*)

An article from the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Monitor* states:

“The police last week arrested 40 former army officers and current army personnel and members of a disbanded opposition group from a ‘terror network’ it said was formed by Dr. Berhanu Nega, an opposition leader who fled to the United States after released in pardon in connection with the aftermath of May 2005 election.” (Daily Monitor (4 May 2009) *Ethiopia: Plotters Sought to Assassinate Officials - Bereket*)

A *Reuters* report states:

“A group accused of plotting to overthrow the Ethiopian government were remanded in custody on Monday again after spending more than one month in prison without any charges or visitation rights, relatives said. Ethiopian security

forces are holding 41 former and current army personnel from a 'terror network' the government says was formed by Berhanu Nega, an opposition leader now teaching economics at a university in the United States. 'They will be held for another two weeks,' a relative who did not want to be named told Reuters outside the court in Addis Ababa. 'They were not even charged today.' The 41 are accused of planning to assassinate senior government figures and blow up public utilities to provoke street protests and overthrow the government." (Reuters (25 May 2009) *Ethiopia "coup plotters" remanded without charge*)

A *Voice of America News* report states:

"Government spokesman Ermias Legesse says the 35 arrested included two groups, one comprising soldiers and another that included civilian government employees and others. He tells VOA police found weapons and other incriminating evidence when they raided the homes of suspects. 'We have got information from different people and we investigate it, and we have gone to the court and the court gave us an allowance to go to their home and we have checked their home and we have arrested 35 people and in their home we have got so many weapons, landmines, soldier uniforms, and their future plan what they want to do,' he said. All those arrested are said to be members of a group called 'Ginbot 7,' or 'May 15th', which is the date of Ethiopia's disputed 2005 election. Ginbot 7 is led by Berhanu Nega, who was elected mayor of Addis Ababa in the 2005 election. But he never took office." (Voice of America News (26 April 2009) *Ethiopia Arrests 35 Suspects in Alleged Coup Plot*)

An *Amnesty International* press release states:

"Amnesty International today called on the Ethiopian government to immediately disclose the names and fate of more than 35 people believed to be held by its security forces on political grounds since 24 April. Additional arrests have reportedly been carried out over the past several days and sources in the country have told Amnesty International that further arrests are expected. Many are believed to have been arrested for their alleged involvement in planning a thwarted attack on the government, but others appear to have been arrested for their own or family members' peaceful political opposition to the government. Amongst the 35 is an 80-year-old grandfather in urgent need of medical care." (Amnesty International (5 May 2009) *Ethiopia: Government must reveal fate of political prisoners*)

This document also states:

"The organization Amnesty International believes that several of those detained have been arrested solely on the basis of family ties with members of Ginbot 7, an opposition group established in the aftermath of the disputed 2005 elections. In addition to General Tefera Mamo and other former military officers who have recently been detained, Amnesty International has confirmed that at least one opposition party member and family members of opposition party leaders have also been detained. These include Getu Worku, the cousin of opposition figure Berhanu Nega." (ibid)

A *Voice of America News* report on the recent conviction of alleged conspirators states:

“An Ethiopian court has convicted 27 people accused of conspiring to create public havoc in an attempt to bring down Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's government. Some of the defendants could face the death penalty. A three-judge panel handed down guilty verdicts for 27 of the 46 defendants in the so-called Ginbot Seven case. Thirteen others who are not in custody had earlier been convicted in absentia. The remaining six were acquitted. Those convicted include several current and retired army officers, including two generals, along with senior opposition political figures. They were charged with plotting to kill unnamed government ministers, destroy strategic facilities and incite rebellion within the army as part of a coup attempt.” (Voice of America News (19 November 2009) *Ethiopia Convicts 27 in Coup Plot*)

See also *Voice of America* report which states:

“Many of 27 convicted last week are current or former military officers. Speaking to the court, they pointed to their decades of decorated service. Some spoke of fighting with the forces that overthrew the previous Marxist regime. Several listed the medals they had won and the wounds they suffered fighting for Ethiopia in its war against Eritrea a decade ago, or serving in Somalia, or in the counterinsurgency campaign against rebels in the independence-minded Ogaden region. Two defendants, both former army majors, admitted their guilt and threw themselves on the mercy of the court.” (Voice of America News (24 November 2009) *Ethiopia Asks Death Penalty For Coup Plotters*)

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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