# Ethiopia: A New Start?

**BY KJETIL TRONVOLL**

MRG

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## THE AUTHOR

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## MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP INTERNATIONAL

MRG works to secure rights and justice for ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. It is dedicated to the cause of cooperation and understanding between communities.

Founded in the 1960s, MRG is a small international non-governmental organization that informs and warns governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the wider public about the situation of minorities around the world. This work is based on the publication of well-researched Reports, Books and Papers; direct advocacy on behalf of minority rights in international fora; the development of a global network of like-minded organizations and minority communities to collaborate on these issues; and **the challenging of prejudice and promotion of public understanding** through information and education projects.

MRG believes that the best hope for a peaceful world lies in **identifying and monitoring conflict** between communities, **advocating preventive measures** to avoid the escalation of conflict and **encouraging positive action** to build trust between majority and minority communities.

MRG has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and has a worldwide network of partners. Its international headquarters are in London. Legally it is registered both as a charity and as a limited company under English law with an International Governing Council.

## THE PROCESS

As part of its methodology, MRG conducts regional research, identifies issues and commissions Reports based on its findings. Each author is carefully chosen and all scripts are read by no less than eight independent experts who are knowledgeable about the subject matter. These experts are drawn from the minorities about whom the Reports are written, and from journalists, academics, researchers and other human rights agencies. Authors are asked to incorporate comments made by these parties. In this way, MRG aims to publish accurate, authoritative, well-balanced Reports.

*Oromo women loading
their donkey with bags
of flour.*
JAN HAMMOND

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**Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities**

*(Adopted by General Assembly Resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992)*

*Article 1*

1. States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.
2. States shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends.

*Article 2*

1. Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.
2. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.
3. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation.
4. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain their own associations.
5. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain, without any discrimination, free and peaceful contacts with other members of their group and with persons belonging to other minorities, as well as contacts across frontiers with citizens of other States to whom they are related by national or ethnic, religious or linguistic ties.

*Article 3*

1. Persons belonging to minorities may exercise their rights, including those set forth in the present Declaration, individually as well as in community with other members of their group, without any discrimination.
2. No disadvantage shall result for any person belonging to a minority as the consequence of the exercise or non-exercise of the rights set forth in the present Declaration.

*Article 4*

1. States shall take measures where required to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.
2. States shall take measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs, except where specific practices are in violation of national law and contrary to international standards.
3. States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.
4. States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole.
5. States should consider appropriate measures so that persons belonging to minorities may participate fully in the economic progress and development in their country.

*Article 5*

1. National policies and programmes shall be planned and implemented with due regard for the legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities.
2. Programmes of cooperation and assistance among States should be planned and implemented with due regard for the legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities.

*Article 6*

States should cooperate on questions relating to persons belonging to minorities, inter alia, exchanging information and experiences, in order to promote mutual understanding and confidence.

*Article 7*

States should cooperate in order to promote respect for the rights set forth in the present Declaration.

*Article 8*

1. Nothing in the present Declaration shall prevent the fulfilment of international obligations of States in relation to persons belonging to minorities. In particular, States shall fulfil in good faith the obligations and commitments they have assumed under international treaties and agreements to which they are parties.
2. The exercise of the rights set forth in the present Declaration shall not prejudice the enjoyment by all persons of universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms.
3. Measures taken by States to ensure the effective enjoyment of the rights set forth in the present Declaration shall not prima facie be considered contrary to the principle of equality contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
4. Nothing in the present Declaration may be construed as permitting any activity contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, including sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence of States.

*Article 9*

The specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system shall contribute to the full realization of the rights and principles set forth in the present Declaration, within their respective fields of competence.

**Convention on the Rights of the Child**

*(Adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989)*

*Article 2*

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

*Article 29*

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

   (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
   (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
   (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate and for civilizations different from his or her own;
   (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
   (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

*Article 30*

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

**International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**

*(Adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966)*

*Article 26*

All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

*Article 27*

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

**International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**

*(Adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965)*

*Article 2*

2. States Parties shall, when the circumstances so warrant, take, in the social economic, cultural and other fields, special and concrete measures to ensure the adequate development and protection of certain racial groups or individuals belonging to them, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. These measures shall in no case entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate rights for different racial groups after the objectives for which they were taken have been achieved.

# Preface

Ethiopia is home to more than 80 different ethnic, linguistic and religious communities. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its people have suffered from successive oppressive regimes, repeated bouts of drought and continual violent conflicts. However, since the forceful removal from power of the Derg in 1991, the country has enjoyed relative peace and a degree of economic development. To a limited extent, its people have been able to exercise their political and civil rights, and Ethiopia's 1994 Constitution recognizes and incorporates a number of important provisions that are beneficial to ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities.

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) has published Reports on the 'Falashas' (Beta-Israelis), the Eritreans and Tigrayans, and most recently, in 1997, on the new State of Eritrea. But this is the first MRG Report to examine the situation of minorities in the whole of Ethiopia. The author, Kjetil Tronvoll, Director of the Horn of Africa Programme at the Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, University of Oslo, has written a number of articles and reports on Ethiopia, including (together with Oyvind Aadland) *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia*, a report on the 1995 elections.

Ethiopia is a country with a long and rich history. This Report gives a brief historical background, highlighting major events of the more recent periods that have affected its people. With the fall of Mengistu's regime in 1991, a coalition of political groups organized along ethnic lines came to power; Eritrea became an independent State; and the internal and external boundaries of Ethiopia were redefined. This transformed Ethiopia from a unitary State into an ethnic federation of nine federal states. Each federal state now has autonomy in administering its region and utilizes its language for administration and teaching. This new practice, on the one hand, has enabled minority groups to utilize and develop their languages and cultures with greater freedom. On the other hand, in some parts of the country, it has resulted in friction between different ethnic groups – in some cases leading to outbreaks of violence, killings and damage to property.
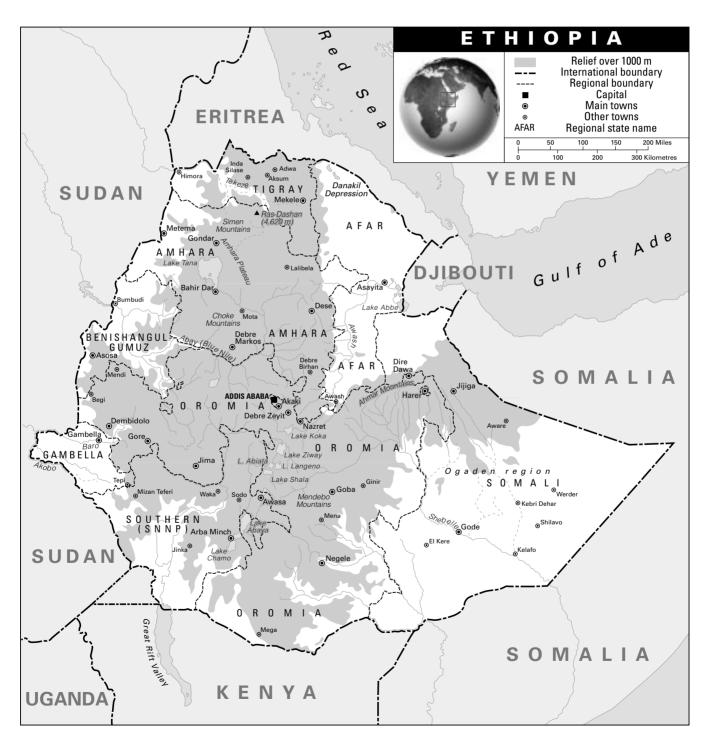
A central issue discussed in this Report is, therefore, how far in practice the Ethiopian government has been able to implement the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the federal Constitution. The text examines the extent to which minorities have been able to exercise and enjoy their political, civil and economic rights. Furthermore, it sheds light on problems encountered by minorities, opposition groups, and regional and federal governments during the transition period, and in the democratization process. Key questions include human rights violations, the abuse of power, war with neighbouring Eritrea, and the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities.

As the text of this Report concludes, to come to power and introduce political liberalization following the collapse of a Marxist single-party government is a very difficult undertaking. The federal Constitution has the potential to facilitate both integration and the enjoyment of diversity, provided that a constructive and pluralistic political climate develops, dialogue is allowed to flourish, and checks and balances on the handling of power are maintained. Furthermore, an important issue is the need to advance the rights of ethnic minorities while respecting everyone's rights, and fostering cooperation between all communities. To this end, the Report contains eight policy recommendations advanced by MRG as a contribution to overcoming current problems, and to supporting and encouraging the democratization process.

**Alan Phillips**
*Director*
April 2000

# Abbreviations

ANDM — Amhara National Democratic Movement
COEDF — Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces
EDU — Ethiopian Democratic Union
ELF — Eritrean Liberation Front
EPDM — Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPLF — Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF — Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP — Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
FGM — Female Genital Mutilation
GPDO — Gedeo People's Democratic Organization
HDUP — Harari Democratic Unity Party
HNL — Harari National League

OLF — Oromo Liberation Front
ONC — Oromo National Congress
ONLF — Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO — Oromo People's Democratic Organization
OPDP — Oromo People's Democratic Party
PMAC — Provisional Military Administrative Council
SEPDC — Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition
SEPDF — Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front
SNNP — Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (regional state)
TGE — Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF — Tigray People's Liberation Front
WPE — Workers' Party of Ethiopia

# Introduction

For centuries 'Ethiopia'[1] has been equated with the ancient Abyssinian cultures of Amhara and Tigray, in both governmental presentation and foreign understanding. The range of other ethnic groups in Ethiopia has scarcely been visible, and until recently little interest has been shown towards understanding their cultures and traditions. In 1991 the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power with a promise to change this historical injustice.

The political turbulence Ethiopia has experienced in recent decades had its origin in the student movement of the 1960s, which gave a voice to the landless peasantry, the exploited urban workforce, women and the oppressed ethnic groups. Growing tensions within the country and a devastating famine led to the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974; a new military government took power and carried out numerous reforms. Nevertheless, protests against the continuation of a centralized regime took root in peripheral parts of the country. The Eritrean nationalist movements, which began their struggle against an oppressive central government in the early 1960s, were later joined by the pan-Ethiopian movements – the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) – and the ethno-nationalists movements – the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 1974 and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1975. By the early 1980s, the TPLF had grown to become the main adversary of the central military government, in addition to the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) fighting for Eritrea's independence. In 1989 the TPLF created the EPRDF to include other ethnic groups under their political leadership in order to continue their struggle beyond Tigray. A year later they entered the capital Addis Ababa when the decaying Derg military regime collapsed.

This Report discusses the complex and demanding situation concerning ethnic representation in State affairs which Ethiopia faced when the TPLF/EPRDF formed a government in 1991. The TPLF/EPRDF's main step was to restructure the Ethiopian State in accordance with its ideology and principles enhancing the rights of ethnic groups, or 'nations, nationalities and peoples'. Ethiopia was established as an ethnic federation composed of nine member states designed according to ethnic criteria, in addition to the federal capital of Addis Ababa.[2] Moreover, in its endeavour to find a sustainable governance solution to secure the peaceful coexistence of majority and minority groups, the TPLF/EPRDF created a radical Constitution, guaranteeing every ethnic group in the country the right to self-determination up to and including secession from the new federal Ethiopian State if they so wished. This constitutional solution was reached to create confidence among the ethnic groups and minorities; that they should no longer have to accept a hegemonic and oppressive central government. By guaranteeing them a constitutional right of independence – albeit containing significant safeguards and delays – the TPLF/EPRDF believes that all majority and minority ethnic groups would prefer to stay within a decentralized, federal Ethiopia, rather than opt for an unsustainable solution as an independent state.

The question of defining who the minorities are needs to be put in context. The largest ethnic group in the country, the Oromo, is politically and socially marginalized and thus might be regarded, politically speaking, as a 'minority' group; while representatives from a numerically minor group constituting c. 6 per cent of the population, the Tigrayans, currently hold the central power and Tigrayans are thus not classified as a 'minority' in this context. Therefore, minorities need to be understood from the point of view of power relations: who has control over what and in which context. Viewing the Ethiopian scenario from this perspective, we see that a group might be hegemonic in one context, while being dominated by another group in a second context. The previous MRG Report on Ethiopia (and Eritrea)[3] also illuminates this point.

In this Report, the term 'ethnic group' will be used instead of the TPLF/EPRDF government terminology of 'nation, nationalities and peoples' – and ethnic group applies to both numerically minority and majority groups. Whether or not the ethnic group of concern is considered a disadvantaged and marginalized group (i.e. a minority in a political and social sense of the term) will be made clear in the text. The term 'minority' will only be used to describe marginalized groups within ethnic groups.

There is a crucial dilemma regarding politics and human rights in Ethiopia today: the TPLF/EPRDF government claims that the constitutional rights of individuals and ethnic groups are respected, while opposition parties, national and international human rights organizations and a broad range of civilian Ethiopian voices deem otherwise and accuse the government of widespread human rights violations. How to balance these views is a key challenge. An esteemed Ethiopian scholar gave the following advice:

> 'One must understand that the Constitution is only meant for foreign consumption, and not for internal implementation. Thus, to analyse the 'EPRDF-Ethiopia' on the background of the Constitution alone, will not at all give a representative picture. Some policies might have changed from the former regimes of Haile Selassie and the Derg, but one thing always remains intact in Ethiopia: politics is run from the centre with a top-down control. This is also the case today.'[4]

This Report presents the views of both the government and its critics. Some will claim that the Report is too critical of the TPLF/EPRDF, others will say that it does not go far enough to denounce their policies. The Report, however, is written with the best of intentions, and offers some critical, but constructive recommendations.

# The land and its peoples

Ethiopia contains a variety of geographical formations and a multitude of ethnic groups. Centuries of migration and interaction between groups of people have created a complex pattern of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, dispersed within broad geographical variations. Thus, to try to reach a coherent geographical and ethno-linguistic system of classification in Ethiopia is a troublesome task.

## Geography

Ethiopia extends over 1,127,000 sq. km, with Eritrea to the north and east, Djibouti to the east, Somalia to the east and south, Kenya to the south and Sudan to the west. Being a mountainous country, Ethiopia comprises three climatic zones and has two rainy seasons. The highland plateau (*dega*) above 2,500 m, with peaks up to 5,000 m, stretches from the north to the centre of the country. Deep valleys traverse the highlands with a milder climate. Towards the south, the *dega* falls away to a medium-range plateau (1,500 to 2,500 m) before it reaches the lowlands in the southernmost part of the country. The eastern parts of Ethiopia constitute a semi-desert plateau, continuing into Somalia, and to the west are lowland plains reaching into Sudan.

The changing climate and environment have influenced the mode of production in the different regions: there are sedentary, plough-based agriculturists in the northern highlands; pastoralists and nomadic groups in the lowland areas in the east and south-west; and hoe-based horticulture in areas of the south and south-west. Desertification and erosion are major problems in Ethiopia. The scarcity of sufficient and predictable rainfalls, with ensuing drought and famine, has also impacted upon the people. Lack of food security has led to the development of informal wage labour migration and resettlement schemes, which have also had implications for inter-ethnic relations in the country.[5]

## The peoples and regions

**Table to show population of ethnic groups in Ethiopia (October 1994)[6]**

| Ethnic group | Number | Per cent |
|---|---|---|
| **Total population** | **53,132,276** | **100.00** |
| Afar | 979,367 | 1.84 |
| Agew/Awngi | 397,491 | 0.75 |
| Agew/Kamyr | 158,231 | 0.30 |
| Anwak | 45,665 | 0.09 |
| Arborie | 6,559 | 0.01 |
| Argobba | 62,831 | 0.12 |
| Ari | 155,002 | 0.29 |
| Aymara | 16,007,933 | 30.13 |
| Basketo | 51,097 | 0.10 |
| Bench | 173,123 | 0.33 |
| Mer | 1,270 | 0.00 |
| She | 13,290 | 0.03 |
| Beta-Israel | 2,321 | 0.00 |
| Burji | 46,565 | 0.09 |
| Charra | 6,984 | 0.01 |
| Dasenech | 32,099 | 0.06 |
| Dime | 6,197 | 0.01 |
| Dizi | 21,894 | 0.04 |
| Ganjule | 1,146 | 0.00 |
| Gedeo | 639,905 | 1.20 |
| Gewada | 33,971 | 0.06 |
| Gidole | 54,354 | 0.10 |
| Guagu | 173 | 0.00 |
| Gumuz | 121,487 | 0.23 |
| Gurage | 2,290,274 | 4.31 |
| Hadiya | 927,933 | 1.75 |
| Mareko | 38,096 | 0.07 |
| Hamar | 42,466 | 0.08 |
| Harari | 21,757 | 0.04 |
| Jebelawi | 118,530 | 0.22 |
| Fadashi | 7,323 | 0.01 |
| Gamili | 186 | 0.00 |
| Gebato | 75 | 0.00 |
| Kechama | 2,740 | 0.01 |
| Keffa | 599,188 | 1.13 |
| Mocha | 53,897 | 0.10 |
| Kemant | 172,327 | 0.32 |
| Kembata | 499,825 | 0.94 |
| Alaba | 125,900 | 0.24 |
| Kebena | 35,072 | 0.07 |
| Timbaro | 86,510 | 0.16 |
| Kewama | 141 | 0.00 |
| Komo | 1,526 | 0.00 |
| Konso | 153,419 | 0.29 |
| Koyra | 107,595 | 0.20 |
| Kunama | 2,007 | 0.00 |
| Mabaan | 23 | 0.00 |
| Mao | 16,236 | 0.03 |
| Me'en | 52,815 | 0.10 |
| Bodi | 4,686 | 0.01 |
| Malie | 46,458 | 0.09 |
| Mesengo | 15,341 | 0.03 |
| Mossiya | 9,207 | 0.02 |
| Mursi | 3,258 | 0.01 |
| Nao | 4,005 | 0.01 |
| Nuer | 64,534 | 0.12 |
| Nyangatom | 14,201 | 0.03 |
| Oromo | 17,080,318 | 32.15 |
| Werji | 20,536 | 0.04 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Oyda | 14,075 | 0.03 |
| Saho | 23,275 | 0.04 |
| Sheko | 23,785 | 0.04 |
| Shinasha | 32,698 | 0.06 |
| Shita | 307 | 0.00 |
| Sidama | 1,842,314 | 3.47 |
| Somali | 3,160,540 | 5.95 |
| Suri | 19,632 | 0.04 |
| Tigrayan | 3,284,568 | 6.18 |
| Tsamay | 9,702 | 0.02 |
| Weyito | 1,631 | 0.00 |
| Wolaita | 1,269,216 | 2.39 |
| Dorzie | 28,990 | 0.05 |
| Gamo | 719,847 | 1.35 |
| Goffa | 241,530 | 0.45 |
| Konta | 49,627 | 0.09 |
| Kulo | 331,483 | 0.62 |
| Mello | 20,189 | 0.04 |
| Yemsa | 165,184 | 0.31 |
| Zeysie | 10,842 | 0.02 |
| Zergula | 390 | 0.00 |
| Other ethnic national groups | 107,073 | 0.20 |
| From mixed parents | 26,770 | 0.05 |
| Djibutian | 367 | 0.00 |
| Eritrean | 61,857 | 0.12 |
| Kenyan | 134 | 0.00 |
| Somalian | 24,726 | 0.05 |
| Sudanese | 2,035 | 0.00 |
| Other foreigners | 16,302 | 0.03 |
| Not stated | 5,827 | 0.01 |

Source: Adapted from *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia*, Office of Population and Housing Census Commission, Central Statistical Authority, Addis Ababa, November 1998.

Nobody knows exactly how many ethnic groups and minorities there are in Ethiopia. Various sources give different numbers according to the definition that is applied.[7] One can safely assume, however, that over 80 groups have distinct cultural traditions and languages.

The languages of Ethiopia reflect this ethnic diversity and belong to several different language groups: Cushitic, Komuz, Nilotic, Omotic, Semitic and the single-language groups of Berta and Kunama.[8] The Cushitic, Omotic and Semitic groups are the largest, and belong to the Afro-Asiatic 'super-family' group, or phylum. They share a number of common structural characteristics. Almost all Omotic languages spoken in Africa are found within Ethiopia, as well as most of the Cushitic languages. Moreover, up to 20 Semitic languages are spoken within the country, including Amharic and Tigrinya. The Ethiopian Semitic languages developed locally, but trace their origin from people migrating across the Red Sea from the Middle East during the first millennium BCE.[9] The languages belonging to the Nilotic and Komuz language groups and Berta and Kunama languages all belong to the Nilo-Saharan phylum and are spoken in the western and south-western fringes of Ethiopia.

Instead of applying any one exclusive principle of classification – as language, cultural traditions, production activities or social stratification – this Report will focus on geographical regions. Within the six regions outlined,

some common social and cultural traits between the groups can be identified, distinguishing the ethno-geographical regions of the northern highlands (the groups within Amhara and Tigray regional states), the central region (the groups within Oromia regional state), the eastern lowlands (the groups within Afar and Somali regional states), southern Ethiopia (the groups within Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples [SNNP] regional state), and western Ethiopia (the groups within Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella regional states). Space prohibits a discussion of all the ethnic groups in the country; however, the sample of the 80 or so different groups illustrates the rich diversity of cultural forms and livelihoods which exist in Ethiopia today.

# Northern highlands (Amhara and Tigray regional states)

The regional states of Amhara and Tigray are usually thought of as ethnically homogeneous, due to the dominating and influential position of Amhara and Tigrayan Orthodox Christian cultures. However, among the Amhara and Tigrayan peoples there are distinct ethnic groups which have resisted the pressure of cultural assimilation by the hegemonic Amharic/Tigrayan cultures.

The **Agew** is a broad category labelling the people who once dominated the highland plateau of northern Ethiopia before the rise of the Aksum Empire.[10] The Agew remained a cultural and political force until the seventeenth century, when they declined in favour of the Amhara. Yet today, small pockets of Agew-speaking people remain in Tigray and in the highland areas of Gojam, Gondar and Wollo.

One group, the **Agew-Awi**, has received a special zone status within the Amhara regional state. The Agew language, called Awngi, belongs to the Central Cushitic family, along with the Kemant language, spoken by another ethnic group in the highland area usually classified as Agew. Both Agew and **Kemant** peoples conduct plough agriculture and are difficult to distinguish from their Amhara neighbours in their everyday life. While most of the Agew-Awi and Kemant have converted to Christianity, some retain their traditional Cushitic religions. However, it is notable that the old Cushitic beliefs have shaped today's Ethiopian Christianity.

The most famous of the highland minority ethnic groups is the **Beta-Israel** – the 'Ethiopian Jews'. The Beta-Israel, called by the derogatory term 'Falasha' (emigrant) in Amharic, lived predominantly in the Semien and Quara regions of Gondar. Their religion with strong Judaic traits has cloaked this group of people in myths and legends of their origin, which according to traditional belief is Israel.

Since they were considered as outsiders by the Abyssinian population and the Orthodox Church, they were not entitled to community land rights (*rist*) and were religiously and politically persecuted.[11] Although the Beta-Israel were recognized by religious authorities in Israel as the 'lost tribe of Israel', thus entitling them to Israeli citizenship, this is not established as a 'historical fact'.[12] This recognition along with the 1984 famine and growing polit-

ical pressure from within Ethiopia, led to a mass exodus of the Beta-Israel from Ethiopia in the 1980s. Two big operations in 1984 and 1991, when Israel airlifted about 30,000 people out of Ethiopia, almost led to the extinction of the Beta-Israel within their traditional homeland of Ethiopia. Moreover, in June 1999 a third exodus of remaining Beta-Israelis started. About 3,800 people from the area of Quara have been allowed to emigrate to Israel and were airlifted out of Ethiopia in mid-1999.[13] Consequently, in Ethiopia today only a very limited number of Beta-Israelis remain, living in scattered communities in Amhara regional state.

# Central regions (Oromia regional state)

The **Oromo** people are the largest politically oppressed ethnic group in Ethiopia. They number some 17 million people and constitute about 33 per cent of the total population of Ethiopia.[14] The Oromo people as a distinct group have historically had little influence and representation within the Ethiopian/Abyssinian State in proportion to their size and the vast area of Oromia. Nevertheless, Oromo individuals accepting the Amharized state structure have held prominent positions within the army, bureaucracy and the noble court throughout modern history. Their language and identity as Oromo, however, have been suppressed.

Historically the Oromo have never constituted a united polity or been ruled by one paramount chief, although there were smaller Oromo kingdoms in the west of the country.[15] The Oromo people are made up of several sub-groups who vary in their cultural outlook and livelihoods, although most of them speak the East-Cushitic language *affaan Oromoo* (Oromo language). Many of the Oromo groups, including the **Arsi**, **Borana** and **Guji**, have developed distinct sub-identities. Broadly speaking, however, there are five main groups of Oromo:

1) The western Oromo live mainly in the Wollega area and are settled agriculturists. Many have been converted to evangelical churches and other Christian sects by missionary churches.

2) The northern Oromo live in Shoa and some areas of Wollo and are more integrated into the Amhara cultural sphere than other Oromo. The northern Oromo are generally bilingual and speak both Amharic and Oromiffa, and most of them follow Orthodox Christianity. Some pockets of Oromo are also found as far north as Tigray.

3) The southern Oromo consist of smaller sub-groups without any regional cohesion. Many are pastoralists and have a semi-nomadic lifestyle.

4) The eastern Oromo live in the Harerge area and in the towns of Harar and Dire Dawa. They have strong links to the Arab world through ancient trade routes and the practice of Islam. Many eastern Oromo leaders are vocal supporters of political Islam.

5) The last Oromo grouping is the Borana, considered by many to be the 'original' Oromo. They live in the southernmost part of Ethiopia and across the Kenyan border.

The **Borana** have partly kept alive the traditional *gada* system – among other things, a politico-administrative sys-

tem – where male age-groups hold the leadership office in the community (*abba gada*) on an eight-year rotating basis. Women are excluded from participating in the *gada*, and are believed to acquire influence and privilege by virtue of their relationships with the men passing through the *gada* grades. The *gada* system goes beyond politico-administrative purposes, however, and also provides a framework for the Oromo way of life. Historically, it is thought that the Oromo were all guided by the *gada*, but with Oromo expansion and migrations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries throughout southern and western Ethiopia, the system declined and disappeared in the Oromo 'periphery'.[16]

Although there are many Oromo sub-groups and cultures, a pan-Oromo identity remains.[17] An Oromo identity connecting all *affaan Oromoo*-speakers might be identified, but since this is so entrenched within the Oromo nationalists' political struggle, it is difficult to distinguish between a 'cultural' identity and a 'political' one. Since the political discourse adapts 'cultural' expressions and projects them as distinct Oromo identity markers, this inevitably infuses a political content into any forms of cultural identity.

# Eastern lowlands (Afar and Somali regional states)

The centralized Ethiopian State traditionally had little presence in or influence over the eastern and south-eastern lowlands. The relationship between the peoples of the area has partly been one of tension and conflict based on religious grounds, and a struggle for control over land and resources, and over the principles of self-rule. All the groups in the area are adherents of Islam and have resisted highland Christian influences. However, economic interaction and trading routes have linked the eastern lowlands with the highlands, particularly via the trade in salt which is mined in Danakil.[18] The mainly barren and climatically hostile areas are inhabited by the **Afar** in the north and **Somali** in the south-east. The **Saho** are based on the highland escarpment in the north, the **Harari** minority live in the town of Harar in the east and the **Argobba** minority group are in the south.

The Afar, Saho and Somali languages belong to the East Cushitic language group. The peoples are predominantly nomadic pastoralists, but there are settled agricultural Afar and Saho communities along the Awash River and in the Tigrayan highlands respectively. Most of the Saho live within Eritrea, with a small cluster on the Tigrayan escarpment and in eastern Tigray.[19]

The Afar and Somali are the largest pastoral nomadic groups in Ethiopia. The extreme arid and barren desert areas of the Afar and Somali provide few income and production opportunities, with the exception of the mining of salt in Danakil. Both groups are clan-based and organized according to patrilineal descent. The **Afar** area spans Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia, with the largest number in Ethiopia. Historically, the Afar were divided into a number of sultanates.[20] Today, however, the role of the Sultan Ali Mira who currently lives in exile is more symbolic than political.

The **Somali** are divided between Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Somaliland. Somali social and political structures are strongly clan-based, where male clan elders historically negotiated the power balance between the clans. With the politicization of Somali communities both inside and outside of Ethiopia, 'political clanship' has emerged where the clan is used as a mobilization ground for political or military purposes by Somali political entrepreneurs. This has in certain areas subdued the influence of the traditional council of elders.[21] Although both Afar and Somali groups control vast territories in Ethiopia which have the status of separate regional states within Ethiopia, Afar and Somali are hardly visible on the 'national Ethiopian scene'. Both peoples have traditionally been characterized as 'hostile' towards their neighbouring groups and also have a history of resistance towards the central government.[22]

The **Harari** are mostly urban dwellers and skilled traders, although they also practise plough agriculture. The Harari are the only people in Ethiopia to be distinguished by their urban character and in the Harari language, they refer to themselves as Ge usu', literally meaning 'people of the city', but are commonly known in Ethiopia by the derogatory term 'Adere'.[23] The Harar area has been granted the status of a separate regional state within Ethiopia due to the uniqueness of Harari culture. Since the Ge usu' have always been surrounded by other dominating groups, they have negotiated their relationships with others and recontextualized other cultural influences in ways that have upheld Harari integrity.[24]

The **Argobba** people live south of Harar City, and a small Argobba community has also settled in the region of Ankober in Amhara regional state. They are plough agriculturists with few cultural traits to distinguish them from their neighbours, except for their language. Argobba and Harari languages belong to the south-ethiopic branch of the Semitic language group.

# Southern Ethiopia (SNNP)

The southern and western parts of Ethiopia are the most ethnically heterogeneous areas in the country. Only a small fraction of the groups living in these areas will be featured in this Report, due to the lack of space to elaborate on all ethnic groups. In this section we will treat the groups living in and around the Great Rift Valley chain of lakes and the Omotic groups separately, since they have certain common social and cultural characteristics respectively.

The groups of the Rift Valley lakes area – **Gedeo**, **Gidole**, **Gurage**, **Hadiya**, **Kembata** and **Wolaita** – live within what is called the '*enset* cultural area'.[25] The *enset* plant (false banana) is the staple subsistence crop in the area, it also generates a mode of hoe-based cultivation. *Enset* cultivation is land-intensive and supports a higher population density than in the northern highlands with its cereal-based crop production. The by-products of the *enset* are used for material for detergent, fodder, fuel, house building, medicine and utensils. *Enset* cultivation, however, requires fertilizer, therefore people usually also keep animals for production purposes as well as for consumption. The major cash crop in the region is coffee, which is widely grown.

The **Sidama** is the largest ethnic group in the south, settled to the east and north-east of Lake Abaya and to the east and south-east of Lake Awassa. Before the Oromo immigration movements, however, the East Cushitic-speaking Sidama covered much of southern Ethiopia. Today Sidama land is considered to be one of the most densely populated areas of Ethiopia. The soil yields a variety of crops. The *enset* plant is the Sidama's staple food and coffee is the main cash crop. The Sidama have a system of social stratification which is described by many as a caste system. The Sidama 'caste system', along with many systems of other groups in Ethiopia, can be seen to create marginalized minorities within ethnic groups.

There are three levels, or categories, of people among the Sidama: the original owners of land (*yemericho*), those who have liberated themselves from the original landowners' domination (*wollabicho*), and those whose 'liberation' is not yet complete (*hadicho*).[26] This social structure reflects the cultural trait of accepting 'strangers' into the area of 'original' landowners, a practice that is widespread in Ethiopia. The newcomers usually enter into a subordinate role under the original inhabitants and are sometimes obliged to do crafting occupations, such as smithing, pottery and tanning, usually despised by the original inhabitants of the area. The low-caste groups are also given restricted traditional political rights. Therefore, even though the Sidama or other similar groups are regarded as 'minorities' within the Ethiopian State, they harbour minorities within their own groups, people who historically have suffered discrimination in social and political spheres. Although much of the discrimination against low-caste groups in Ethiopia has disappeared, a social stigma is still attached to people affiliated to these sub-groups.

The **Gurage** are the second largest population group in the southern region of Ethiopia. They are distinguished by among other things their traditional religion, which permeates most aspects of social life, although a substantial share of Gurage are Christian (Orthodox and Lutheran) and Muslim. It is difficult to draw distinct lines between the religions since religious syncretism is widespread. Individuals may be nominally Christian or Muslim, but still be adherents of traditional religion.

The traditional Gurage religion requires adherents to participate in two out of three religious cults. All men are united under *Wak* (the Sky God), and everybody participates in annual celebrations in his honour. In Gurage mythology *Wak* is a male hero, and his spiritual rewards enhance the prestige and status of the people who honour and worship him. *Damwamwit* is the female deity honoured by Gurage women and can be described as a 'guardian spirit' devoted to looking after the wellbeing of the Gurage. The third deity is *Boza* (or *Bwaja*), the Thunder God, who is worshipped by men and women. *Boza* provides ritual protection to his followers against destruction of their property by lightning, and safeguards against thefts. The three cults are organized on a territorial basis with a hierarchical structure beginning at sub-clan level and culminating with a paramount representative. The paramount representative is the key ritual functionary at the annual celebrations in honour of the deities. This centralized and hierarchical form of traditional religious

practice contrasts with the political organization of Gurage society, which has relatively independent local units in a segmentary form.[27]

South of the *enset*-cultural area are the **Konso**, who speak an East-Cushitic language related to *affaan Oromoo*. The Konso are settled agriculturists who grow sorghum as a staple food and coffee and cotton as cash crops.[28] Livestock, mostly cattle, are also farmed. Konso are divided into three districts with different sub-groups, and traditionally the people lived in densely-populated walled towns, which are unique to the Konso.

Like the Borana, the Konso have a generation-graded society, but the Konso's system does not provide a framework of political-administrative authority that transcends the sub-groups/towns, as the Borana *gada* system does. Although the system does not serve to unite a pan-Konso area of cooperation, some ritual functions are performed at a higher district level. The Konso system serves to divide the male generations into four principal categories, although there are several more distinct grades. This generation-grading system provides a hierarchy of functions and obligations for the male members of society. Women were kept outside the system and historically Konso society observed a rigid gender division whereby the men had special prerogatives within the spheres of religion, politics, production and social life. The tradition of separate men's houses where the men sleep also reflects such practices. Connected to the social practices of gender differences, there is a strong symbolic expression of masculinity, projected through various phallic symbols. Women are generally excluded from certain religious rituals, since they are thought to have a weakening emotional and physical effect on men. Such practices emphasize the ambiguous status of women in Konso cosmology and society. In some respects they are regarded as 'outsiders', and in others the basis for the society's existence and continuation, most evidently in their role as bearers of children.

In the extreme south-western corner of Ethiopia the Omo River runs southward with its outlet into Lake Turkana. The people of the area – such as the **Dizi**, **Hamar**, **Kwegu**, **Mursi**, **Nyangatom** and **Suri** – speak languages belonging to the Omotic family. The classification of the Omotic languages, among many others, are still not fully recorded.[29] Due to the peripheral location of the Omotic groups, their visibility within the Ethiopian social and historical context has been limited. Until quite recently, outsiders had little knowledge of their cultures and traditions.[30] What is known, however, is that the area, with its 45 different ethnic groups in addition to c. 35–40 smaller minority societies,[31] provides the most complicated pattern of intra- and inter-ethnic relationships in Ethiopia.

The many population groups and scant natural resources have contributed to frequent violent intergroup skirmishes. Most of the groups have a patrilineal descent system as a social organizing principle, and most of the Omotic peoples are agro-pastoralists and hoe cultivators, growing both cereal crops and *enset*. Some, however, such as the **Kwegu**, who number only a few hundred and live on the banks of the River Omo, are also experts at fishing and hunting.[32]

The southern neighbouring group to the Kwegu is the **Mursi**, a group of 3,000–4,000 people. Although the

Mursi depend on agriculture for subsistence, they see themselves as herders and take great pride in their cattle. The Mursi have a position of dominance over the Kwegu – who provide them with various goods and services,[33] based upon their fishing and hunting skills.

The Mursi are threatened by their southern neighbours, the **Nyangatom**, with whom they compete over scarce resources. With many regional wars, automatic weapons have come to the periphery of the Omo Valley, and in Nyangatom raids several hundred Mursi were killed in the late 1980s.[34] Sadly, the latest decades have shown that conflict between ethnic groups is growing in this region of Ethiopia. Since the natural resources are becoming scarcer and the new ethnic federal system encourages political mobilization along ethnic lines, there will probably be an increase of ethnic conflicts in such marginal areas which are peripheral to the central authorities.

# Western Ethiopia (Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states)

The western Ethiopian border areas constitute lowlands which continue into Sudan. Of the numerous original inhabitants of the area, many peoples are found on both sides of the border. In Gambella regional state the major ethnic groups are **Anwak** and **Nuer**, while **Komo**, **Majangir** and **Opo** make up very small regional groups. In Benishangul-Gumuz regional state **Berta** (or **Jablawi**) and **Gumuz** are the main groups, constituting about half of the population. **Komo**, **Mao** and **Shinasha** represent smaller groups. In recent years, however, many **Amhara** and **Oromo** have moved into these areas, and today, over 35 per cent of the population in Benishangul-Gumuz are Amhara and Oromo, and over 15 per cent in Gambella.[35]

The original peoples of the area speak languages belonging to the Nilo-Saharan phylum. Their traditional political systems are generally highly decentralized and the majority are sedentary hoe agriculturists, while the Anwak and Nuer have an agro-pastoral and semi-nomadic lifestyle. The majority of the people still practise their traditional religions, although Christian missionary churches are increasing their work in the area. Only the Berta are Muslim and the Gumuz are mixed Christian/Muslim.

The **Nuer** are one of the main groups in southern Sudan and only a small number live within the Ethiopian borders. They are cattle people, and their animals have an almost sacred position within Nuer society being a centrepiece of the Nuer economy.[36] The historical Nuer political organization is truly egalitarian, with no traditional chiefs. Nuer are organized in a highly segmentary system, which may, in times of crisis and warfare, unite larger Nuer segments against other segments or against outsiders. Due to the prolonged internal war in Sudan, shifting political alliances between the Ethiopian and Sudanese authorities, and refugee problems in the border areas, great pressure has been put upon the Nuer traditional livelihood.

The **Anwak** society is more hierarchical than the Nuer. Anwak are predominantly agriculturists but subsistence

hunting, fishing and gathering are also practised.[37] Anwak society underwent radical social and cultural changes during the Derg regime (see later), since many of their traditions and social institutions were banned as 'feudal' and 'anti-revolutionary'. Also the regime's 'development' policies had a sharp impact on the Anwak area. Since it has good water resources and is sparsely populated it was targeted for agricultural development. Various projects including the forced resettlement of 50,000–60,000 people from elsewhere in Ethiopia on Anwak land, irrigation and mechanized agriculture have had a drastic impact upon their livelihood.[38] The Derg's villagization programme (see later) and Christian missionaries have also deeply influenced **Majangir** society, the Majangir being one of the smallest minority groups in Gambella.[39]

Due to the lack of statistical information available, it is difficult to assess which groups are particularly marginalized. However, on a general level, nomadic pastoralists are among the most vulnerable in Ethiopia. They live in a marginalized environment and their grazing rights and areas of movement are increasingly curtailed due to neighbouring agriculturist groups and the State's push for 'modernization'.

# Ethiopia: From unitary state to ethnic federation

Ethiopia is the only state in Africa that has never been externally colonized.[40] The expansion of the Amhara-dominated Abyssinian state structure in the late nineteenth century, may however be considered as an internal 'colonization' of the southern and western regions of present-day Ethiopia.[41] We need to go back to recent Ethiopian history to shed light upon the development of the modern Ethiopian State.

Emperor Tewodros, crowned in 1855, inaugurated the first efforts to unify and create a 'modernized' state by withstanding pressure from local and regional power bases.[42] Confronted by local and regional kings, his support collapsed as he became more authoritarian. In the fight to succeed him the regional king of Tigray won the race and became Emperor Yohannes IV (reigning from 1872 to 1889), the first Tigrayan emperor in several centuries. Contrary to Tewodros's confrontation with regional powers, Yohannes IV was ready to devolve power to monarchs and subordinates who recognized his claims to be 'King of Kings' (*negus negast*) over all the regional chiefs. Yohannes's main opponent, the future Emperor Menelik II, at that time the King of Shewa, had to be forced into submission. After Yohannes's death in 1889, Menelik II (reigning from 1889 to 1913) managed to wrest the throne from the Tigrayan line of successors. He pursued a policy of expansion but also had to confront the Italian occupation of Eritrea. The final battle took place on 1 March 1896 at Adwa, where the Italian troops were roundly defeated by Menelik's army.

Parallel to the 'pacification' of the Italians, Menelik was intent on winning new territories in the south. The well-organized Abyssinian army, equipped with modern firearms, met resistance from local and regional Oromo chiefs and from other peoples such as the Gurage, Sidama and Wolaita. These peoples were defeated and succumbed to the military might of the Abyssinian State, a conquest similar to that of the European colonizers elsewhere on the African continent.[43] By the beginning of the twentieth century 'Ethiopia' was formed and Menelik concentrated on consolidating his new empire. With the Tripartite Agreement of 1906, between Britain, France and Italy, Ethiopia's international legitimacy as an independent and sovereign state was secured.

Economic motives were a major element in Menelik's expansion objectives. He received huge revenues from the new areas under his domain; a central treasury department and a taxation system were developed during his reign. The central State also implemented a dual military and settler policy to maintain control and hegemony over the newly conquered regions. Fortified villages (*katamas*) were built throughout the new territories to serve as administrative and military centres for the central government. In these villages and elsewhere in rural outposts Amhara military families settled to represent the northern presence, and to discourage rebellion among the conquered groups. These military settlers were called *neftegna*, literary meaning 'bearers of the gun', a term which is still used by southerners and lowland groups to negatively describe highland, official representatives. All these Amhara representatives were assigned a number of local farmers (*gabbar*), to provide the Amhara with a stated amount of produce and services. The obligations of the *gabbar* to the Amhara seem to have varied from region to region. Generally, the *gabbar* had to give the Amhara regular quantities of grain, provide extra food during ceremonial occasions and help with agricultural activities. There are reports from Sidama that 35 per cent of the *gabbar*'s annual income was taken! With the *neftegna-gabbar* system, the centralized Ethiopian State controlled the newly conquered periphery and imposed an Amhara domination.

## The Abysinnian conquest

One can only imagine the terrible experiences of the people who succumbed under Menelik's campaigns. Many of these groups were pastoralists and non-Christian, and were looked upon as pagan and 'backward', deserving little respect from the well-equipped, advancing Christian army. In the conquest of Kaffa, for instance, Menelik's regional King, Ras Wolda Giyorgis, mobilized an army of 31,000 troops armed with 20,000 rifles against the local King Gaki Sherocho's estimated 300 obsolete firearms.[44] All Kaffa men and youths were ordered to fight the invading Abyssinian force. Previously the Kaffa had managed to remain independent, but this time they met a devastating defeat against the formidable Abyssinian army. It is worth noting that many non-Amhara were in the Abyssinian army, both as officers and ordinary soldiers.

The manner in which military offensives and the incorporation of new land were carried out differed from region to region according to the resistance the Abyssinian army met. A French national on a commercial visit to Ethiopia accompanied Menelik during his conquest of the Wolaita in December 1894. The historian Harold G. Marcus has translated his written description of the campaign and has used the material to exemplify Abyssinian conquest of a minority people:

*'As the object of the campaign was to reduce the country into submission, there was, from the very beginning, "looting of houses and crops, slaughtering of animals, sacking of the country [and] burning". Every day the conquerors came back to camp with slaves and booty. With their superior weapons the Shoans [representing the Abyssinian State] slaughtered large numbers of Wollamos [Wolaitas]. "It was a terrible butchery, a debauchery of living or dead flesh … by the soldiers drunk from blood"…. By December 11, the resistance of the Wollamos had been broken, and on the march that day, "our mules turned aside continuously from recently killed corpses which encumbered the country. The wounded, horribly mutilated, were trampled by the cavalry men". … On December 18 and 19 Menelik divided up the rich booty, keeping eighteen thousand heads of cattle and eighteen hundred slaves for himself. He then returned triumphantly to Addis Ababa, taking along king Tona [the defeated Wolaita king].'* [45]

The view from the Amhara centre of the 'new Ethiopian State' was of vast peripheral regions with no 'cultural' value but economic and political interests. Marcus describes the Amhara sentiment thus:

*'The subject peoples in the empire were generally seen as primitive, without culture or effective government, and lazy, dirty, and warlike: they were naked or dressed in skins; they were heathen who needed the word of God.'* [46]

In this manner the Abyssinian conquest of southern and western Ethiopia was similar to traditional European colonization in that it legitimized colonization with a 'civilizing' objective: the central imperial government secured 'peace, law and order'. Additionally, the settler policy was perceived as a benefit for the marginalized minority communities since it introduced them to a believed 'superior' agricultural mode of production (plough-based) and thought (Christianity). The presence of representatives of the central authorities facilitated the opportunities for local leaders and entrepreneurs to enter national political life through acculturation. It is doubtful whether such an 'amharized' understanding of Menelik's conquest finds any resonance among minorities, with the exception of some of the elites that benefited. The local women were exposed to degrading treatment by the central army, and many were abducted, raped and forced into 'marriages' with northern soldiers. Individual peasants and pastoralists lost their land rights and were subdued under Amhara 'landowners'.

Today, this history provokes political denunciation by minority representative organizations. The OLF, for instance, has the following understanding of the 'natural' entity of Ethiopia and the Amhara 'civilizing' rule:

*'At no time before the conquest by Menelik was the present day Ethiopia a single country. What existed were independent polities – kingdoms in Abyssinia to the north, various confederacies in Oromia and others under the gada system, the southern kingdoms of Walayita, Kaficho, and Yem,*

*and various communal systems in the Nilotic and Omotic regions. The official Ethiopian history that … presents Menelik's era as "the unification of Ethiopia" is a fabrication, pure and simple. As in the rest of Africa, the Oromo and other southern peoples were subjugated, their peace, their cultural identities and human dignity deprived. … The Oromo and other peoples of the south who survived the genocide were subjected by Menelik to the most dehumanizing form of domination. Their land was confiscated and divided among Menelik's warlords, the clergy, and local "colonial troops" known as "neftenya".'* [47]

Based on the particular history of the establishment of the modern Ethiopian State, the OLF, among others, explains its resistance war against this State as a war of decolonization and liberation, in order to gain internal legitimacy and international acceptance. Which historical narrative comes closest to a 'historical truth' is difficult to say. However, the establishment of the Ethiopian borders at the start of the twentieth century is at the core of today's political controversies in the Horn of Africa.

# Regime transitions

### The reign of Haile Selassie

During Menelik II's reign the Ethiopian State was consolidated, but it was Haile Selassie I who during his period in power (1930–74, *de facto* from 1916–74) bridged Ethiopia's ancient past with the modern era. He took over as regent under Queen Zewdie after the three-year interim period of Lij Yasu. Haile Selassie continued a policy of centralization and nation-building, by creating national institutions and a pan-Ethiopian economy, developing modern communications and entrenching the Amhara-dominated official 'state culture'. Haile Selassie also strengthened the coercive means available to the State. The Emperor's bodyguard, the police and Africa's largest military force were all established along with an advanced Public Security Department. The centralization of power and the introduction of a new Constitution must be seen in the context of Ethiopia's heterogeneous population, and its cultural, religious and linguistic environment. It might be explained that Haile Selassie developed Ethiopia's bureaucratic administration and centralized state as a counterweight to centrifugal forces that threatened Ethiopia's unity. Such state- and nation-building theories were defended by most politicians and scholars at the time, and still are to a certain degree. In retrospect, however, it is obvious that developing the coercive means of the State at the expense of a democratic process was one of the main failures of Haile Selassie's reign.

Amharic was the official language of the empire. In practice it served as the language of administration as well as the language and culture of integration. Those of Afar, Gurage, Oromo, or other ethnic groups who were drawn into the army and bureaucracy, simultaneously accepted a

process of acculturation. Marcus explains that 'politically and socially ambitious people became Christian, took appropriate names, learnt Amharic, and began to dress and even to eat like Shoans [Amhara]'.[48]

In the same vein, many of the Shoan royal family are of mixed Amhara/Oromo descent, and even Haile Selassie was half Oromo. The increasing centralization and modernization of the Ethiopian State also led to a growing number of people of ethnically mixed parenthood. The Amhara settlers (*neftegna*) in the south, west and east married people from the local communities; soldiers stationed in the new regions had children with local women; southerners and westerners who took up positions in the bureaucracy married Amhara people, etc. While these ethnically mixed Ethiopians speak Amharic and have adopted the highland (*habesha*) cultures, they do not consider themselves as 'Amhara', but as Ethiopians. Indeed, some argue that the history of the origins of the Amhara and the processes of assimilation and acculturation entail that Amhara no longer denotes an ethnic category, but a social group.[49]

## The Derg regime

With growing economic problems, drought and famine, political unrest, and a patrimonial system of governance that had outlived itself, the Ethiopian military – in what has been called 'the creeping coup' – gradually took power and finally overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie in September 1974. The 'Provisional Military Administrative Council' (PMAC) – popularly called the Derg (Amharic for council/committee) – was established as the new government of Ethiopia. This Council became an arena of power struggle, and two of its chairs functioning as Heads of State were killed before colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam became the chair and Head of State in 1977. The Derg regime inherited the core problems of the past: Ethiopia as a 'colonial' polity, containing a multitude of centrifugal forces and sustained only by force; a problem which remains at the centre of Ethiopia's political challenges today. Soon after the takeover the regime pursued a Marxist ideology, and then state formation and nation-building became a centralizing process once again. The 'Marxist revolution' in Ethiopia of the late 1970s and early 1980s internalized and articulated the core 'Ethiopian' values and beliefs, with a few modifications and variations dictated by the new State ideology.

In 1976 growing civilian pressure against the military regime led to the Derg beginning to transform into a Marxist government. The full phasing out of the Derg as the ruling body of Ethiopia came with the establishment of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984 and the subsequent reorganization of the State into the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in September 1987. But the term Derg continued to be used by the civilian Mengistu-led government.

The Derg reformed the whole State apparatus in Ethiopia, and drafted new policies which impinged directly upon people's everyday lives. Possibly the most important change was land reform which gave control of the land back to the peasants; at the same time all rural and urban land was nationalized. The Derg also organized all the people into rural and urban administrative units (*kebele/gebere-mehaber*: or urban dweller/peasant association), linking all individuals to the administrative control of the State.[50]

Mengistu Haile-Mariam's attempt at Marxist nation-building failed. Employing the State administrative apparatus as a State/party command structure which dominated Ethiopian life down to the lowest urban and rural administrative unit, Mengistu's regime engaged in a cruel and bloody civil war on two fronts against opponents of his government. One segment was an ideological pan-Ethiopian opposition, which included the EPRP. The EPRP criticized the military regime and claimed that a true socialist revolution had to be led by a broad-based socialist party, not a military government. Mengistu's government viewed the EPRP as a political threat and labelled them the State's 'enemy number one' in September 1976. Subsequently a 'political cleansing' took place in urban centres throughout Ethiopia, and tens of thousands of EPRP members were imprisoned, tortured and killed by the regime in what has been termed the 'Red Terror' campaign.[51]

Parallel to the pan-Ethiopian opposition to the Derg, ethnically-based resistance movements were also gaining support, mainly represented by the EPLF, the OLF and the TPLF. Rural, peripheral rebellion had been seen before as peasants in Bale, Gojjam and Tigray had revolted against the centralizing processes of Haile Selassie's regime.[52] However, an opposition that defined its goals and mobilized on an ethnic basis instead of an ideological one – where peripheral 'minority' groups fought against an amharized dominating centre – was a novel idea.

## The coming of the EPRDF

The TPLF was established in 1975 and its initial objective was to liberate Tigray from an Amhara-dominated Ethiopia and to create an independent republic of Tigray. Soon after its armed resistance started, however, the TPLF redefined its objectives and aimed at cultural and political autonomy for Tigray within a democratic Ethiopia.[53] By 1989 the TPLF had liberated the whole of Tigray and decided to continue the struggle with the aim of toppling the Derg regime so that the issue of oppressed ethnic groups could be settled for good in Ethiopia. To pursue the struggle against the Derg beyond Tigray, the TPLF needed political and military allies from other oppressed peoples. Thus, in January 1989 the EPRDF was established, composed of the TPLF and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) which was later renamed the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM).[54] The TPLF was the dominating party within the coalition, and used the EPDM/ANDM to mobilize the Amhara peasants against Derg oppression. In order to widen the coalition against the Derg even more, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) was established by the TPLF in 1990 after talks with the OLF in the late 1980s failed to include the latter in the coalition.[55] The first members of the OPDO were Oromo prisoners of war captured from the Derg army. The OPDO aimed at recruiting support among the Oromo people in competition with the first Oromo movement,

the OLF. After the fall of the Derg, yet another EPRDF partner was created in order to represent the multi-ethnic southern region of Ethiopia, named the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF). This happened after the establishment of the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition (SEPDC), an umbrella for many small opposition parties in the southern region.

The common denominator with all the EPRDF coalition partners and affiliates is that they were initiated by the TPLF in order to consolidate ethnic representation and control over the various regions of Ethiopia. Since these parties originated in the wake of the TPLF, many opposition movements consider them to be illegitimate representatives of their people and mere puppet parties under Tigrayan control.

The war against the Derg regime intensified towards the end of the 1980s, with the EPLF gaining ground in Eritrea, and the OLF and TPLF as the main Ethiopian movements were successful in their advances towards Addis Ababa. More and more people turned against the Mengistu government and war fatigue developed among the Ethiopian masses. The EPRDF's last offensive towards Addis Ababa met with little resistance. With Mengistu's escape to Zimbabwe in mid-May 1991, the Derg army morale collapsed and EPRDF forces entered Addis Ababa without any notable resistance on 28 May 1991. Prior to the TPLF/EPRDF takeover, United States of America (USA)-led negotiations had been conducted in London where the USA gave its endorsement for a new government in Ethiopia led by the TPLF/EPRDF and an acceptance of an EPLF-controlled Eritrea.[56]

# The transitional period 1991–5

## The Transitional Charter

Since the main resistance against the Derg regime originated in minority and ethno-national grievances, a natural consequence of the victory was an attempt to settle these grievances. The TPLF/EPRDF promised that ethnic groups would no longer be subjugated under an 'Ethiopian identity' which only reflected the cultures, history and traditions of the ruling Amhara elite. Instead, a heterogeneous complex of identities was to be projected. Indeed, the intention was to reconfigure the Ethiopian State to reflect the composite sovereignties of each ethnic group and minority.[57]

To facilitate the transition, a *Transitional Period Charter for Ethiopia* was drafted to be used as an 'interim' constitution for Ethiopia. Twenty-seven political organizations participated in the national 'Peace and Democracy' conference which ratified the Charter in early July 1991, the most important ones being the TPLF/EPRDF and the OLF.[58] A number of the smaller ethnic organizations, however, had been established by the EPRDF for the conference, in order to display a broad-based, Ethiopian platform. Organizations which failed to make a statement renouncing violence as a form of political struggle, along with the old Workers' Party of

Ethiopia (WPE), were excluded from the conference. Additionally, the newly formed coalition movement, the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF), composed of pan-Ethiopian organizations in which the EPRP was the leading member, was not invited. This reinforced the new 'political order' in Ethiopia, an order based on ethnicity and a federal structure. The EPLF was present as an observer only, since it did not have any direct stake in internal Ethiopian politics.

The Charter has ostensibly offered a new course for Ethiopia, based on the principles vested in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Leenco Lata, one of the OLF participants at the conference, noted that the Charter 'envisaged four elements that fundamentally departed from the autocratic and imperial tradition of Ethiopia to transform the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized nations'.[59] These four elements were: the establishment of rule of law, and that no group or individual – including the transitional government – should be above the principles vested in the Charter; equal representation and power-sharing, entailing the establishment of a coalition government with representatives of all resistance groups and movements; a total restructuring of the State apparatus in order to facilitate a true democratization process; and, lastly, the 'reign of just peace' for all groups and minorities in the country.[60]

The second major outcome of the national conference, in addition to the Charter, was the recognition of Eritrea's right to self-determination and independence, pending an internationally monitored referendum on the status of the country. In the conference, the EPLF argued that only those 'nationalities' who had been ruled by an overseas colonizer had a legitimate claim for self-determination and independence. Hence, other than Eritrea, the rest of the Ethiopian peoples should seek a settlement within the borders of the remaining empire. The issue of how the Ethiopian ethnic groups should be organized within the State structure was not discussed in full at the conference.

## Eritrean independence

Eritrea's turbulent history as a separate polity began just over a century ago, with Italian colonization. Prior to the advent of the Italians, the three Eritrea highland districts of Akele-Guzai, Hamasien and Seraye, and the coastline around Massawa, had been part of the Tigray province under the Abyssinian State system. Eritrea was established as a colony in January 1890 and the Italians stayed in power until 1941 when they were defeated by the Allies during the Second World War. A British Military Administration was set up as a transitional solution, until the United Nations (UN) decided that Eritrea should be federated with Ethiopia in 1952. Just 10 years later, however, Emperor Haile Selassie violated the federal agreement and incorporated Eritrea as Ethiopia's fourteenth province. This also marked the start of the armed Eritrean liberation struggle, initiated by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Later a splinter group from the ELF established the competing EPLF which soon became the dominating force in the struggle against the Derg regime. In 1982 the EPLF drove the ELF out of Eritrea and established itself as the hegemonic Eritrean front, militarily as

well as politically. Finally in 1991, after 30 years of liberation war, the Eritrean struggle was successful, with the EPLF taking over Asmara on 24 May. The EPLF established the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) in order to govern the *de facto* independent country in the interim period leading to the referendum on independence in 1993. [61]

The referendum process in Eritrea was, as mentioned, supported by the TPLF/EPRDF/Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) in Ethiopia. Some Ethiopian resistance movements were, however, opposed to the idea of a referendum on Eritrea's independence, and stated that the whole Ethiopian population should be included in the electorate. This issue was not supported by the EPRDF/TGE, and only Eritreans living in Ethiopia and Ethiopians of Eritrean decent who registered in an electoral roll, were allowed to vote on the referendum in Ethiopia. The outcome was predestined and 99.8 per cent voted in favour of independence. [62]

However, despite the bitter intensity of the Eritrea-Ethiopia war, ending with Eritrea's liberation, tragically a new war broke out between the two States in October 1998. This impacts most heavily on the peoples living close to the border.

# The Ethiopian transitional elections

After the national 'Peace and Democracy' conference which ended on 5 July 1991, an 87-member Council of Representatives was established with members from almost all of the resistance movements, including the EPRDF (32 members) and the OLF (12 members). The TGE faced a wide range of political challenges and declared that drought relief, rehabilitation and demobilization of the defeated Derg army should be prioritized. However, the two main factions within the TGE – the TPLF/EPRDF and the OLF – were soon at loggerheads; this developed into armed clashes.

The resistance movements had initially agreed on the principle that the different fronts should continue to administer the territories they controlled when the Derg regime was toppled and that the TPLF/EPRDF, as the major front, should administer all other areas. The question of who controlled the south-eastern parts of Ethiopia arose; the OLF claimed that they had liberated this region, a claim that was denied by the TPLF/EPRDF, who insisted that it had been under Derg control and thus should be administered by the TPLF/EPRDF. In August 1991 the disagreement escalated into armed clashes between the TPLF/EPRDF and the OLF troops. Clashes continued during the autumn and escalated to involve other Afar, Oromo and Somali factions who fought each other and the TPLF/EPRDF. With the EPLF and the USA as mediators a fragile truce between the parties was established, but was misused by the TPLF/EPRDF and only a few days prior to the local and regional elections in February 1992, the OLF decided to withdraw from the balloting, citing a lack of democracy in the country. [63] The elections were implemented as scheduled, but were char-

acterized as 'non-competitive' by most international observers. In the aftermath the OLF – with its 15,000 troops – also withdrew from the TGE. This move was met with massive force by the TPLF/EPRDF and another brief civil war ensued to destroy the OLF's capability to launch a military campaign against the TGE. Over 19,000 Oromo were detained in the process, many arrested on mere suspicion of being OLF sympathizers. [64]

After a short period of turbulence and the fear of open anarchy had subdued, the contesting groups tried to reconcile their views of how politics should be organized in the transitional period. The TPLF/EPRDF declared that any group who rejected violence in achieving political power and accepted the rules and policies developed by the TPLF/EPRDF were welcome to participate. At the same time, however, the TPLF/EPRDF developed ethnically-based political organizations among the many smaller groups in the southern and western regions and made them subordinate parties to the TPLF/EPRDF. The opposition parties rejected the TPLF/EPRDF's plan for resumption of political activities and were particularly worried about the development of what they termed the TPLF/EPRDF's 'puppet-parties' among the many ethnic groups in the country. Thus, in March 1993, the opposition issued a joint statement that condemned the TGE. Since the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) was one of the authors of this statement, it was expelled from the Council of Representatives by the TPLF/EPRDF and its seats were given to members of the newly formed TPLF/EPRDF-affiliated ethnic organizations. After these purges only a handful of members in the once broad-based Council of Representatives was not directly part of, or affiliated to, the TPLF/EPRDF.

From then on the political process in Ethiopia became polarized and entrenched, with the TPLF/EPRDF in power confronted by a broad-based, but uncoordinated, opposition. Generally, three groups could be seen to be competing for the control of the State in Ethiopia, both prior to and after the fall of the Derg. [65] The TPLF, while being the major military and political force in the governmental coalition, ethnically represents a numerical minority. The TPLF presents itself as the legitimate ruler, since it was the TPLF that ousted the Derg regime. The second grouping is the OLF which has been oppressed by the centralist state both politically and economically. It is largely the Oromo people who 'fill' the breadbasket of Ethiopia, and agricultural surpluses from these areas have always been extracted in favour of the *habesha* (Abyssinian highland) rulers. Since the Oromo groups have never controlled the Ethiopian State, their relationship towards the new Ethiopia is ambivalent: should the central State be controlled or destroyed? The third grouping is composed of the 'centralist' and pan-Ethiopian opposition organizations that are predominantly, but not exclusively, Amhara based. In post-Derg Ethiopia these organizations are generally excluded from positions of State power and their old hegemonic role has collapsed. They do not align themselves with the OLF, which they view as anti-Ethiopian, and they oppose the TPLF/EPRDF ideology of ethnicity which they believe is fragmenting the unitary Ethiopia.

The constitution-making process culminated in the election of a Constitutional Assembly in 1994. The Assem-

bly's function was to ratify the final version of the Constitution. The actual drafting had been undertaken by a Constitutional Commission basically dominated by TPLF/EPRDF-nominated members. The opposition forces had little influence in the drafting process, and a TPLF/EPRDF observer described it in the following terms:

> *'Constitution-making under the EPRDF has little in common with the bargaining, trade-offs, and compromises that usually typify such processes; rather it reflects the weakness of the country's democratic institutions, the political objectives of the governing party, and its position of dominance within a state where serious opposition had been crushed or marginalised.'*[66]

All of the major opposition movements boycotted the elections, and the few local and regional parties which tried to challenge the TPLF/EPRDF were blocked by the government. The candidates to the Assembly were chosen for their position towards the content of the Constitution,[67] there was dissent on only two paragraphs in the draft Constitution: the issue of 'self-determination up to and including secession' and the status of land ownership. The land issue under dispute was whether land should be privately owned, or whether it should continue to be controlled and distributed by the State. The election was conducted within a peaceful atmosphere, but cannot be described as a 'democratic' exercise that would add public legitimacy to the Constitution that was endorsed.[68] Although the major political opposition groupings in the country agreed in principle that the draft Constitution was a well designed document – with some modifications on the articles on secession and land ownership – they feared that it would not be applied impartially and they had little confidence in the ratification process. The 1994 election must thus be understood in a political context of distrust – a context which still prevailed when the first national elections under the new Constitution took place in May 1995, for Federal and Regional Assemblies.

Since there were few signs of an improvement in the democratic atmosphere in Ethiopia before the 1995 elections, the major opposition parties and coalitions continued their policy of non-participation. Thus, the outcome of the 1995 regional and federal elections was a foregone conclusion. Few countries sent observers, and the only published report from an independent monitoring group dismissed the election as 'neither fair, free nor impartial'.[69]

A critique of the 1995 elections may be summarized into four points: first, the elections were not competitive, hence it is difficult to assess the TPLF/EPRDF's real support among the electorate and its democratic legitimacy; second, the process leading up to the elections favoured only the TPLF/EPRDF parties and affiliated partners, thus preventing many legally registered political actors in the country from participating; third, although the technical and administrative conduct of the ballot had improved from the previous elections, in all areas of observations violations of the Electoral Law occurred; and fourth, government structures and bodies were used to subdue the rural population and any expression of opposition.[70]

Under the Ethiopian process of 'democratization',

there have been three nationally held elections to date, all of which have been totally dominated and controlled by the TPLF/EPRDF. The major opposition parties have been denied participation in the process, since the 'political space' is so controlled and restricted by the TPLF/EPRDF. Therefore, the major opposition groupings have chosen a strategy of non-participation to challenge the democratic mandate of the TPLF/EPRDF government.

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# Ethnic federalism: Power to the minorities?

When the TPLF/EPRDF entered Addis Ababa in 1991 the main challenge was to establish a government and reform the State in order to establish political legitimacy among the wide range of Ethiopian people. Just as political legitimacy for the new government after the 1974 revolution lay in solving the land question, no government following the Derg could hope to win legitimacy and support without addressing the issue of ethnicity in governance. This was grounded in two factors: first, all the main opposition movements still active at the time of the Derg's fall were organized on an ethnic basis. The pan-Ethiopian opposition movements, most notably the EPRP, had been so radically weakened during the Red Terror and in wars against the TPLF, that they were no longer significant movements within Ethiopia in the early 1990s. The other main reason for developing an alternative form of post-Derg government is to be found in Ethiopian history. As described earlier, many Ethiopian ethnic groups have been dominated by a strong amharized state. In that respect the TPLF was viewed by many as a continuation of the northern domination. Thus, in order to create confidence and legitimacy among the other groups, the TPLF/EPRDF was of the opinion that only by giving every ethnic group in Ethiopia the right to autonomy and secession if so wanted, could the groups overcome the fear of belonging to the Ethiopian federation. It is within such a context that the TPLF/EPRDF spokesperson and speaker of the House of Representatives, Dawit Yohannes, explained the introduction of the new ethnic federal system during the first election for Regional and Federal Assemblies in 1995:

> 'The EPRDF is challenging the political environment of Ethiopia. We do not have loyalty to history, it has proved to fail. We do not either perceive to contain Ethiopia as an absolute entity as our main goal, hence we also accepted Eritrean independence. We must find a solution which is beneficial for the Ethiopian people today, therefore history will not provide the answer. History has been used as a veil, covering up differences within Ethiopia. People have believed that we have had unity in this country, but this has never existed. What they call unity was a geographical entity dominated by one ethnic group. An Amhara peasant had never met an Eritrean, likewise an Afar nomad had never heard of a Nuer, let alone seeing one. And this they call unity! At the stage Ethiopia is now you cannot force people to form a unity.'[71]

In a way, the 'ethnification' of Ethiopian politics can be seen to be following the Derg and its predecessors' domination of the traditional unitary, centralized Ethiopian State. What should not be overlooked, however, is that the Derg did address the nationality problem. In general its policy did not regard ethnicity as a legitimate organizing principle, but preferred class distinction and mass organizations as tools of mobilization and administration. Nevertheless, the Derg founded the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities in 1983, and in the preamble to the proclamation establishing the Institute it is noted that:

> 'in recognition of the right of every nationality for self-determination, guarantees that each nationality shall have its history and identity, culture and habit, language, religion and rights respected fully and equally'.[72]

One of the Institute's committees was given the responsibility to draft suggestions for a new Ethiopian constitution. One of the suggestions forwarded to Mengistu proposed the division of the country into administrative regions and districts based purely on ethnicity, providing a map which is strikingly similar to today's ethnically-based administrative regions. However, one of the factors which dissuaded the Derg from implementing such an administrative structure was the heterogeneous ethnic environments in southern and western Ethiopia. Ethnic groups do not have clear-cut geographical borders. In several areas throughout Ethiopia there are overlapping zones of ethnic influence. Therefore, the Derg opted for a suggestion which accommodated several criteria, including ethnicity, efficient administration, sustainable economy and political power.[73] The TPLF/EPRDF can therefore claim, with some justification, that its model of ethnic administration is both new and alien to Ethiopia. In theory it is not, since this was initially suggested during the Derg; but in practice it is, since the Derg rejected it for political and administrative reasons.

## 'Constitution for a Nation of Nations'[74]

What, then, does the TPLF/EPRDF Constitution of 1994 contain? It is noteworthy that the 'Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia', as is its full name (hereafter the Constitution), represents a clear breach with the former Ethiopian Constitutions implemented during the reign of Haile Selassie and the

Derg. First, it establishes Ethiopia as a federal State, contrary to the unitary principle of the two former regimes. Second, the form of government is republican, rather than monarchical under an emperor; and third, it sanctions a democratic multi-party system, contrary to the Derg's single-party regime. Moreover, the new Ethiopian Constitution (Article 13.2) gives protection to wide-ranging individual and collective human rights, guaranteeing the implementation of the international Covenants and instruments Ethiopia has ratified (see later). The Constitution, however, combines presidential and parliamentary forms of government in a manner that minimizes the separation of powers and the checks and balances found in other federal arrangements.[75] The main constitutional control on governmental hegemony and authoritarianism is embedded in the federal provisions and the right to self-determination for ethnic groups. The principle that 'every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession', however, is clearly the most radical and controversial element found in the Constitution (Article 39.1).

The Constitution establishes that the 'nations, nationalities and peoples' of Ethiopia are the minimum component parts of the country, as opposed to individuals. Thus, the preamble to the Constitution does not commence with the familiar 'We, the people of …' but 'We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia …' Furthermore, the Constitution states that 'all sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia' and that the Constitution 'is an expression of their sovereignty' (Article 8.1 and 8.2).

Who, then, are these nations, nationalities and peoples? The Constitution provides the following definition:

> 'A *"Nation, Nationality or People"* for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory' (Article 39.5).

No distinction is drawn between the three categories and no official definition can be given to explain the differences between them.[76] Basically, they can be understood as ethnic groups of varying composition and size, thus generally giving the same rights and protection to dominating and hegemonic groups as to oppressed and marginalized ones. Moreover, within the new constitutional system, the TPLF/EPRDF denies the existence of any 'minorities' in Ethiopia, i.e. ethnic and religious groups which are politically oppressed or marginalized.[77] Since all groups are equal and enjoy equal rights, the logic goes, there is no need to define specific minority rights.

Let us look closer at the powers vested in the ethnic groups of Ethiopia and how the rights are enshrined within the federal system. Every group has the right to:

> 'speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history' (Article 39.2).

Moreover, every group:

> 'has the right to a full measure of self-government that includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and Federal governments' (Article 39.3).

The current federal structure, however, only constitutes nine member states (*kilil*) in the Ethiopian federation, of which six are geographically designed in such a way that a dominating ethnic group can control the state: the Afar, Amhara, Harari, Oromo, Somali and Tigrayan peoples each control 'their' state. The states of Benishangul-Gumuz and SNNP, as well as the Gambella peoples' region are multi-ethnic without any controlling ethnic group, although one can claim that for the Gambella, the Anwak dominate the Nuer and other smaller groups, and in Benishangul, the Gumuz dominate the Berta and other groups. Even in SNNP we find some groups which are more powerful than the others, such as the Sidama and Wolaita.

As a check on potentially hegemonic groups within a state, however, each ethnic group has the right to establish its own state, if so wished, and thus join the Ethiopian federation on an equal level with the other nine member states (Articles 47.2 and 42.3).

Whether the ethnic groups were consulted before the introduction of the new system and the drawing of administrative and states' borders, except, perhaps, for an elite of pro-TPLF/EPRDF political leaders, is another issue. No referendums were conducted among the smaller groups in order to assess their opinions on whether they wanted to join any larger ethnic group to form a state.

Each of the nine member states of the federation has its own legislative, executive and judicial 'powers' – or these will be developed – and the Constitution grants them power to: draft and implement particular state constitutions; to design social and economic development policies; and to levy certain taxes. The administration of land and natural resources, however, comes under federal law, and the self-administration must be conducted under 'general national standards'.

In his analysis of the Constitution, Brietzke concludes that:

> 'the formal powers of Ethiopian states are thus meagre, compared to the powers states possess under many other federal arrangements … [and] accorded a modicum of political independence, Ethiopian states will probably remain subservient to the federal government in economic and social policy matters. The managerial benefits of federal decentralization are thus unlikely to materialize under the language of the new Constitution.'[78]

The federal government is controlled by two representative bodies, namely the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of Federation. The Ethiopian Parliament is not, however, bicameral in the conventional sense. The House of Representatives, which is the highest authority, has full legislative authority and oversight functions, while the House of Federation mainly functions as a Constitutional Court in case of disputes (so far there

have been none), and in addition may 'decide on issues relating to the rights of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples to self-determination, including the right to secession' (Article 62.3), (again, so far there have been no cases raised). The House of Representatives has 548 members elected from majority-based, single-member constituencies for a five-year term. 'Minority nationalities and peoples' have been reserved 20 seats, but no definition is given on who the minority nationalities and peoples are and how they obtain these seats. In the House of Federation, all ethnic groups in the country are to be represented with one member, and the bigger 'nations' and 'nationalities' have one additional member for each 1 million of its population (Article 61.2). In an outline compiled by the House of Federation, however, only 61 ethnic groups are represented, while five members are listed without ethnic affiliation. Therefore, numerous ethnic groups are not represented in the House.

The nine member states within the Ethiopian federation operate on a unitary principle. These states do not have an internal federal structure and the two main administrative levels within the state (*woreda* and *zone*) do not have any separate legislative authority. The basic unit of administration within the state is the *woreda*. Within the multi-ethnic states usually one ethnic group is given a *woreda* or *zone*. Where this is not possible, all ethnic groups within the *woreda*, regardless of their size, are to be guaranteed representation in an elected *woreda* council. In certain areas special *woreda/zone* are designed to protect minorities which live within the territory of a dominating group. According to the scant information available, eight special *woreda* exist – five in SNNP, two in Benishangul and one in Afar – and three special *zone* are established in Amhara regional state. No coherent federal procedure of the establishment of special *woreda/zone* exist, this is left to the individual regional states (under Article 52.2a of the Constitution). The justification for establishing a special *woreda* may come from the regional state's government or from the specific group of concern. However, only the Argobba have managed to fulfil the process of achieving special *woreda* status on their own initiative, whereas the rest have been suggested by the federal or regional governments.[79]

# Challenges of constitutional implementation

The Ethiopian Constitution undoubtedly guarantees the protection of collective and individual rights. Few other constitutions in the world, if any, include the right to self-determination up to and including secession for all ethnic groups who desire it. Thus, the Ethiopian Constitution may seemingly be characterized as one of the most minority-friendly constitutions in Africa, or even globally. Moreover, the new constitution safeguards the equal status of women under the law, and the government is seemingly emphasizing women's rights in their policy making. However, constitutionalism and the rule of law are not abstract, theoretical terms aloof from the everyday life of citizens. If a constitution that excels in providing human

rights protection and necessitates a sound and transparent system of governance is not implemented and defended in practice, its value is meagre. This is the core of the criticism raised against the TPLF/EPRDF government – that it does not respect and uphold its own Constitution. Moreover, many argue that the ethnic federal system is designed to perpetuate the TPLF's position in power by divide and rule tactics, since its own ethnic constituency only represents some 6 per cent of the population.

Furthermore, Merera Gudina, leader of the new opposition party Oromo National Congress, argues that the government is ignoring the right of the numerical majority of the population, i.e. the Oromo; and that its actions are different from its practices:

> *'The most serious problem in Ethiopia today is that the rule of the minority is being institutionalized in the name of democracy. It is a minority that rules Ethiopia today, excluding the majority. This has to end. The issue is to liberate the majority, not the minorities.'*[80]

Merera Gudina reflects a concern held by many peoples in Ethiopia today; what is the real agenda of the TPLF/EPRDF? Are they sincere in their objectives to democratize the Ethiopian State and to devolve power to the 'nations, nationalities and peoples'? Or is this system purposely designed to place ethnic groups against each other in order for the Tigrayan minority to control the centre? Only the coming years will provide the answers to these questions. There are, however, disturbing signs indicating that TPLF/EPRDF suspicion towards all 'opposition' political movements and groups hinders a peaceful development of democratic ideas and practices in the regional states. For instance, after the fall of the Derg no EPRDF-affiliated party was ready to fill the political and administrative void left in the southern regions of the country. Therefore, the first administration set up in these areas was staffed by Tigrayan military and political cadres, and only after some time were local ethnically-based parties created whose members could fill administrative and 'elected' positions.

John Young, who has been studying the TPLF for many years, points out that it is indicative of the TPLF's need to control the political process that it did not establish alliances with existing southern parties, but preferred to create its own.[81] Moreover, the TPLF started a campaign of harassment and intimidation of local political leaders not affiliated to the EPRDF, in order to marginalize and alienate them from their local constituencies.[82]

Since the EPRDF did not build on any existing organizations in the south, the people they recruited into positions lacked administrative or political experience. The opposition claims that the new followers of the EPRDF were generally opportunistic youths who took the chance offered to them to acquire power and prestige. Equally, when a new local political elite comes into position basically motivated by opportunism, there will be questions over its legitimacy. Alessa Mengesha, the leader of the southern opposition party Gedeo People's Democratic Organization (GPDO) and executive committee member of the SEPDC, explains that:

*'The provisions in the Constitution, I cannot deny, are really good. But its implementation is very weak. The EPRDF says that self-administration is there. But self-administration will be real only when people like Abate [the president of the SNNP] is really in power and not only in office. Therefore, I don't tell my people that they are exercising their rights, because they are not in the real sense exercising their powers. Everything that is done in the south, including in Gedeo, is in the interest of the TPLF and EPRDF, and not in the interest of the Gedeos and the southern peoples. Their consent is not requested, even though there are Gedeoffa speakers in office. Those Gedeoffa speakers are not using their knowledge of the language to talk to their people and communicate their rights. Thus, there are Gedeo people in office, but not in power. If the democratic rights are not exercised on the ground, I do not think we can talk about any true minority rights.'* [83]

Alessa Mengesha points to the troublesome relationship between the federal government and the regional states in current governmental practice. Both during the Emperor and the Derg regimes the unitary State emphasized a centralized decision-making system, a policy which was one of the main reasons for their demise. Today, on the other hand, the TPLF/EPRDF's legitimacy rests on the claim of devolved political power to the regional states and peoples. Nevertheless, information gathered in the regional states seems to substantiate the claim that Ethiopia is still very much controlled by central government, and that the constitutional devolution of power is not adequately implemented. [84]

John Young has identified five methods of TPLF/EPRDF control or influence over internal politics in the eight member states not directly governed by the TPLF. [85] First, the direct representation of the EPRDF on state councils, as currently exists in Afar and Benishangul-Gumuz states; second, there are key EPRDF 'advisers' in each state, who play an active, and some claim decisive, role in political affairs; third, the EPRDF provides a wide range of courses and educational functions for state and party officials and bureaucrats, disseminating and streamlining an EPRDF 'way of thought'; fourth, the EPRDF can directly discipline members of its affiliated organizations and remove them from their political positions; and finally, the EPRDF-controlled army has assumed, or tries to assume, direct control in various 'unstable' peripheral parts of the country, such as the Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and Somali states, and within the Borana zone of Oromia state. [86]

On the other hand, the strong TPLF/EPRDF control may also be explained by the fact that many of the peripheral states lack competent people to staff the regional bureaucracy, thus demanding a larger presence of TPLF/EPRDF to fill the void. Moreover, observers have noted that certain peripheral districts in some of the regional states are not under any regional state administration. For instance, the two northernmost districts in Benishangul-Gumuz state, Metema and Quara, are not administered from the regional capital Asosa. Regional officials were unaware of whose responsibility it was to administer these two districts. [87] Consequently, under the current federal system, we may assume that certain peripheral geographical pockets operate more or less as autonomous, quasi-independent areas administered by traditional structures or opposition movements.

As pointed out above, there are positive sides to the new system, i.e. that state, *woreda* and *zone* party officials and bureaucrats are predominantly from the area in which they reside and work. Hence, most of Ethiopia's non-Amhara population no longer have to speak Amharic in order to engage in local affairs. But there is a difference between political elites and ordinary citizens in expectations of the outcome of ethnic federalism. A new local elite has emerged which has taken over the positions and benefits previously held by the Amhara. However, pastoralists and peasants, and women from the periphery, may not have gained that much. They still struggle to make a living, and politics is still perceived as something which hurts you and only brings sorrow and extra burden to the household.

The constitutional endorsement of collective rights for minorities in Ethiopia has also led to confrontations where collective rights have endangered citizens' individual rights. Such incidents have occurred throughout Ethiopia, but the Harar situation is illustrative of these developments. The TPLF/EPRDF designated Harar as a separate regional state due to the particular culture of the Ge usu' (Harari) people of Harar City. However, this political decision did not take into account the city's ethnically mixed population, which also includes Amhara, Gurage, Oromo and Somali peoples alongside the Ge usu'. The Ge usu' are divided over how to organize the city politically; one group advocates the exclusivity of Ge usu' rights to authority over the region on the basis of their historical dominance, and another group claims that rule over the city should reflect the diverse social and ethnic origins of the city's population. [88]

Both sides of the debate have organized politically, the Harari National League (HNL) was established in 1991 by the ruling elite, and the opposition Harari Democratic Unity Party (HDUP) was formed in 1992 as a response to the ethnic exclusivity of the HNL. Yet prior to the elections in 1992, the EPRDF gave full political authority to the HNL to appoint its own council members. Christine Gibb, who has carried out long-term fieldwork in the area, writes:

*'this arrangement gave the party control over the administration of the region during the transitional period and further, ensured that Ge usu' would effectively control the region by holding an ethnically-based right to veto power in the administration voted into place in June 1995'.* [89]

Only the Ge usu' were eligible to stand for the seats on offer in the city, thereby excluding the minority Amhara, Gurage, Oromo and Somali groups in the city. In the rest of the region, however, an equal number of seats were also open to candidates from other ethnic groups, resulting in the current arrangement that the HNL controls all seats within the city walls, while the OPDO (the EPRDF Oromo party) claims all the remaining seats in the region. But, since the inner city council has been given special

political prerogatives, the Ge usu' (who only constitute some 15 per cent of the total population in Harar regional state) fully control the legislative and political process in the regional state. As such, the collective political rights of the Ge usu' overrule the individual human rights of the majority of the population in the regional state.

The political, economic and social discrimination against non-Ge usu' in Harar has created a tense political atmosphere in the area. In the spring of 1999 several meetings and student rallies were held in Harar to protest against the domination of the Ge usu' in the city. These protests were sparked by the fact that the regional council did not select any Ge usu' for the regional quota of military recruits to be sent to the war front against Eritrea. Only Amhara, Gurage, Oromo and Somali were recruited from Harar regional state. The independent news media reported from a student rally in March 1999 that:

> *'Except for the Hararis, most of the students expressed that they were prepared to defend the sovereignty of the country but added that before that happened they required as Ethiopians [that] they should be able to get [a] placement in the regional government offices and organizations without any prejudice. Moreover, the Hararis who are members of the ruling class should likewise register to go to the war front and fulfil their obligations as Ethiopian citizens.'*[90]

The division between the peoples of Harar regional state is unlikely to be bridged until a solution is negotiated in the dispute between collective and individual rights.

## Constitutional legitimization of ethnic conflict?

There has been a long process of inter-ethnic integration in Ethiopia, so much so that today a considerable proportion of the Ethiopian people have a mixed ethnic background. Additionally, to physically demarcate geographical borders between the various ethnic groups' 'homelands' is difficult, since there have been considerable population movements in many parts of Ethiopia. Therefore, the ethnic federal Constitution, which makes ethnic identity the most relevant identity in any social, political or economic interaction in the country, is felt by some to be a straitjacket. Moreover, growing democratization, industrialization and urbanization, along with a free market economy, and increased population mobility, will force inter-ethnic integration to continue at an even greater pace. Opponents of the ethnic policy thus argue that by cementing ethnicity as the only valid identity-marker, this will have a negative impact on Ethiopia's political, economic and social development.

In its policies the TPLF/EPRDF has chosen to concentrate on the positive elements of ethnicity; providing a group of people who share language and cultural values with a sense of common identity. But others argue that ethnicity 'captured' within the political structure of the State also has a conflictual nature, since ethnic groups are competing with each other for scarce resources, namely politi-

cal power, and material and natural wealth. The Ethiopian State embraces a number of ethnic groups and when the relationship among them is defined and formed on the basis of control and domination at political centres at various levels (federal, state and district), the same political system may encourage ethnic conflict and tension.

Despite the possible good intentions of the TPLF/EPRDF in organizing the Ethiopian State on an ethnic basis, a system of 'ranked' ethnic groups is emerging which may lead to the exploitation and oppression of 'weaker' ethnic groups by politically stronger groups.[91] If such processes are left unchecked, or indeed are fuelled by the political system itself, conflictual situations may occur which not only set one group against another, but may also fragment ethnic groups along lines of clan or lineage.

We may use the recent Gedeo-Guji conflict to illustrate how ethnicity has been politicized by the new system of governance.[92] The Gedeo people are settled agriculturists and live in the fertile, densely populated SNNP region. The Guji, an agro-pastoral people, are their neighbours to the east, in a lowland area which is not so densely populated. Traditionally, the Gedeo and Guji interact peacefully; they intermarry, exchange produce and cooperate in production efforts. In the border areas the people are generally bilingual; and Gedeo live within Guji territory and *vice versa*. The Guji are part of the Oromo family, but the Gedeo also have elements of a *gada* structure, and the two groups have similar types of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

In conjunction with the new administrative entities and borders, the issue of where the physical borders between the two ethnic groups should be drawn has aroused immense concern. Since agricultural land is scarce, there have been sporadic outbreaks of conflict over landed resources in this area before. Moreover, the border between the Gedeo and Guji is also the same as the border between the Oromia and SNNP regional states, which infuses these borders with even greater importance. Many Gedeo live within traditional Guji territories in Hageremariam *woreda*, and it has been reported that political cadres from both groups utilized this situation when the border demarcation process was discussed, and fuelled the ethnic tension between the two population groups. Guji cadres utilized the fear among the Guji that they might lose control over their traditional land, and managed to mobilize the people against the Gedeo living in their neighbourhood. During a few days of intense fighting in the summer of 1998 reportedly more than 260 Gedeos were killed, and tens of thousands were forced to flee their homesteads, resulting in an 'ethnic cleansing' of Gedeo from Guji traditional territories. Instead of employing the conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms found in Gedeo/Guji societies to overcome the growing tension, political actors in the local societies exacerbated the conflict by referring to the constitutional framework sanctioning a coherence between geographical borders and ethnic boundaries.

The Gedeo-Guji conflict is not a single or exceptional case, but one of a number of similar conflicts between agriculturists and pastoralists. Other examples include conflict between the Guji and Sidama, between Ari and lowland pastoralists in southern Omo, between Afar pastoralists

and Kereyu in the east and centre, and between Amhara and Oromo peasants. Many of these conflicts, which are basically competition over scarce land resources, have been dormant, but the new constitutional order has given a 'legitimacy' to infuse them with an ethnic dimension.

There are many other examples of how the Constitution has been used to 'legitimize' ethnic conflicts and 'ethnic cleansing'. The first years of TPLF/EPRDF rule (1991–3) saw a surge in ethnic conflicts in the south, as a forewarning of the potentially destructive element of the ethnic federal system. Regional and local ethno-political groupings took advantage of weak state control and engaged in a massive eviction of people of other ethnic origins. Examples of this include the massacre of Amhara settlers in Bedenno, Oromia, allegedly perpetrated by the OLF and the massive eviction of Amhara and destruction of their property in Arbagugu and in Wolaita soon after the TPLF/EPRDF take-over.[93]

Conflicts over boundaries between regional states have also emerged, as between Borana Oromo and the neighbouring Garre Somali. Some of the difficulties in settling such conflicts are due to the state borders being initially decided by the federal government, yet under the Constitution any changes to the borders must be jointly decided by the states concerned. However, as the federal government to a large degree still controls the regional states, a local solution to border issues cannot materialize from below.

John Markakis has identified competition for resources in a scarce environment as the major factor that shapes the confrontation between groups and individuals in the Horn of Africa.[94] Since State power is the means for controlling the production and distribution of material and social resources, access to State power, be that federal or regional, will be the focus of conflict. Moreover, when competition takes place in the political and not the economic realm, ethnicity becomes the most efficient basis for political mobilization. However, the selection of ethnic boundary markers, i.e. the factors which are used to identify ethnic identity, is arbitrary in the sense that only some features are stressed, while others are neglected. Consequently, 'ethnicity' may also be a political construct, manipulated and created by political entrepreneurs in order to select and reinterpret aspects of culture and history that fit into the legitimization of a particular power base.[95] In addition, the Constitution gives legitimacy to demands for self-determination and even independence for every ethnic group and minority. This has been characterized by Brietzke as a 'recipe for disaster'.[96]

Therefore, the admirable 'ethnic' rights in the Constitution, may also have another side. The establishment of an ethnic federation with strong collective political rights might not quell ethnic mobilization against the political centre as intended. Instead, new arenas of confrontation and ethnic hegemony are created. Within the multi-ethnic *zone* and states, locally dominating groups may oppress smaller groups to achieve local or regional ethno-political hegemony. On the federal level, a similar competition is likely to take place between three ethnic groups – Amhara, Oromo and Tigrayan – over Ethiopian hegemony. This might lead to a situation whereby the group which controls the federal government may once again feel the need to centralize power in order to acquire sufficient control over Ethiopian territory.

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# Human rights under pressure

When assuming power in 1991 the EPRDF promised to implement an ambitious programme of political reforms, enshrining democratic standards and respect for human rights. This promise was followed by a process of accession to international human rights instruments.[97] Acceding to these instruments implies that the Ethiopian government is obliged to draft and implement its policies in accordance with international human rights standards. The Ethiopian Constitution confirms this view and contains elaborate chapters on human and democratic rights (Articles 8 to 44), which, according to Article 13.2:

> 'shall be interpreted in a manner conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights and international instruments adopted by Ethiopia'.

Nevertheless, almost a decade after the TPLF/EPRDF took power, human rights violations still occur throughout Ethiopia.[98] Detention without trial, torture, 'disappearances' and extra-judicial executions are regularly reported by international and national organizations. The government has given the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) increasing access to places of detention. The ICRC reported that by the end of 1997 some 10,980 people were still held in custody in relation to the 1991 ouster of the Derg regime or for other security reasons. Additionally, the ICRC registered 5,660 new detainees.[99]

The conditions in prison are harsh, there is overcrowding, little food or medical treatment. Galan, an OLF supporter, has been repeatedly detained by TPLF/EPRDF security forces since 1992. His last detention was in the Awash Arbaa military camp from August 1998 until January 1999. He says:

> 'For the first months they used to come at night and tie my hands and legs together and then pass an iron bar between them and hang me […]. They used to whip the soles of my feet with sticks and squeeze my testicles […]. I became unable to control my urine and they deliberately used to leave me in the mess […]. During this period […] the TPLF did not spare my relatives. They killed my father, my sister and brother. They repeatedly detained my wife who […] was to deliver in detention.'[100]

The TPLF/EPRDF government is generally reluctant to admit any responsibilities for human rights abuses, and usually blames the incidents on local officials. However, the TPLF/EPRDF appears to be very sensitive to criticism of human rights abuses and is concerned about its international reputation. Since the government bases much of its policies and international reputation on being 'different' from the Derg, criticism of its human rights record is taken as an attack on the government's legitimacy.[101]

After critical reports made by Amnesty International and the American Association for the International Commission of Jurists (AAICJ) in 1995,[102] by way of response the government distributed a booklet by a previously unknown organization called the International Transparency Commission on Africa (ITCO-Africa). Various quotations in the booklet are formulated as an official response to the human rights reports, and Ethiopia's Foreign Minister, Seyoum Mesfin, is quoted as stating:

> 'The Amnesty International and the New York Branch of the AAICJ report fabricated incidents of human rights violation is a price we have to pay for democratic transparency, but it does not absolve them from moral and legal accountability. Worse still, that they refuse to admit publicly their errors of omission and commission with impunity is adding insult to injury.'[103]

The TPLF/EPRDF denial of any wrongdoing was repeated after the 1999 report by Amnesty International on human rights abuses as a consequence of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war. All allegations are bluntly rejected.[104] Rather than accepting responsibility for human rights violations, the TPLF/EPRDF government defends itself behind the progress which has been made in economic, social and political development since the fall of the Derg, and by stating that to transform the political culture of the country will take time. Hailekiros Gessess MP, the EPRDF foreign relations spokesperson, explained on an earlier occasion to the author that:

> 'It is natural that certain individuals and bodies violate human rights taken our violent past into consideration, but this does not mean that the government supports it. To change the political climate and attitudes in this respect takes time. This should be stated as a preamble in any report on human rights in Ethiopia. […] There is a different concept of human rights in Ethiopia. To EPRDF human rights is the right to live, to eat, to education. Thus, the material conditions have to be fulfilled and get priority.'[105]

One should be sympathetic towards the tremendous challenges the TPLF/EPRDF is facing in terms of economic, social and political constraints. Moreover, taking

the regional context into consideration, it is a daunting task to transform a culture of violence in a short time. This, combined with limited resources to carry out an efficient juridical reform process,[106] and the link between some human rights violations and deep-rooted cultural norms and traditions, make the context of human rights in Ethiopia a complex issue. Thus, one cannot judge the TPLF/EPRDF government on the basis of experienced change alone. One needs also to consider its expressed and practical will to deal with human rights. It must attempt to launch policies, and foster a change of attitudes and behaviour in the directions pointed out by international human rights instruments, NGOs and, increasingly, the desires of Ethiopia's citizens. The government's preparations of establishing an independent Human Rights Commission and an Ombudsman's Office are encouraging steps. However, the seeming lack of appropriate action and determination to condemn and tackle the abusive human rights culture within its own midst, should be of grave concern.

## Stigmatization of ethnic groups

Of particular interest for this Report, is the increasing stigmatization of certain ethnic groups which are labelled by the government as secessionist factions. Since, among others, some of the Oromo and Somali people's ethno-political movements – respectively the OLF and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) – have an objective of seeking independence from Ethiopia, many Oromo and Somali are suspected of supporting these movements on the basis of their ethnic identity alone. The Ogaden Human Rights Committee and Oromo Support Group have reported hundreds of detentions without trial and disappearances of people from their constituencies. The Ogaden Human Rights Committee reports that Somali people are detained without trial on suspicion of supporting the 'anti-peace elements', a term the TPLF/EPRDF authorities frequently use to label members and supporters of the ONLF and Al-Ithad (a Muslim fundamentalist group consisting mostly of Somalis). In the Ogaden (Somali regional state), the Committee argues that:

> *'arbitrary detentions without charge or trial, torture of detainees to death, summary executions, gang raping of women, child molestation, looting and illegal confiscation of property are commonplace, and are daily practised by Ethiopian army and security forces with impunity'.*[107]

Sahane, a restaurant owner from Ogadenia, claims:

> *'There is no detention without torture. My hands were tied tightly behind my back with a rope. I was beaten indiscriminately until I lost consciousness. I was deprived of sleep and food for two days. After five months of illegal detention without trial, I was released.'*[108]

The Ethiopian government's accession to international human rights instruments should indicate its willingness to obey these same instruments. Moreover, this accession obliges the government to report on the implementation of the standards embedded in the instruments, and thus be held internationally accountable for its actions. The TPLF/EPRDF government should therefore fulfil the obligations embedded in the international instruments and in Ethiopia's Constitution.

# Key challenges

The Ethiopian government is struggling to change a violent political culture in the country while it is concentrating on speeding up economic development. Ethiopia is ranked 172 out of 174 in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s human development index. This index 'reflects achievements in the most basic human capabilities – leading a long life, being knowledgeable and enjoying a decent standard of living'.[109]

At the turn of the millennium, the life expectancy at birth in Ethiopia is 43 years, and the adult population literacy rate is 35 per cent, with GDP per head at US $171. Since the TPLF/EPRDF came to power, the adult literacy rate and life expectancy have been fairly stable, but the GDP per head has risen from US $131 in 1992. Nevertheless after eight years of relative peace, Ethiopia is still ranked among the bottom five countries in the world in terms of securing 'basic human capabilities'. Moreover, the outbreak of war against Eritrea in 1998–9, will have an impact on the Ethiopian economy, in addition to undermining the potential for stable and peaceful political development in the Horn of Africa for years to come.

## Developing a political culture of human rights

To develop a culture of human rights and democracy in a traditionally authoritarian society is a long-term process. The TPLF/EPRDF inherited a State bureaucracy with remnants of feudal experiences from the Emperor's reign and hardline defenders of the Derg dictatorship. Added to this was a weak and partly coopted civil society, and an underdeveloped economy in which the State is still the dominant actor.

Thus, since both the old State bureaucracy and the new TPLF/EPRDF government lacked knowledge and experience of human rights and democratic governance, the challenge for the new government was three-fold: first, to redefine and develop its own political ideology to fit the new concepts of multi-partyism and human rights; second, to re-educate political leaders and cadres in democratic understanding and behaviour; and third, to influence the State bureaucracy and Ethiopian society at large in adjusting to and adopting a new 'political culture'.

So far, says Ms Almaz Meko, speaker of the House of Federation, an emphasis has been placed on creating awareness of human rights issues, in the State bureaucracy as well as among the people; since if people are not aware of their rights, these cannot be properly defended.[110]

The international donor community has so far relied on the TPLF/EPRDF's spoken intentions and will to develop a political culture of human rights in the country, and thus excused many of the human rights violations as being outside the federal government's control. Some international scholars have also interpreted the government's policies and actions as a genuine attempt to democratize Ethiopia; but the majority have concentrated on the TPLF/EPRDF's actions and not their rhetoric, and thus queried their willingness to truly open up for democratic competition by non-TPLF/EPRDF forces.[111] They have in particular raised concerns over how a small ruling clique of Tigrayans controls the federal government and harasses and intimidates representatives from other ethnic groups who are politically stigmatized as 'opposition' to the TPLF/EPRDF.

## The Ethiopian-Eritrean war

As a side-effect of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war, the Eritrean minority in Ethiopia has been placed under severe stress. Over 54,000 have been deported at the time of writing (early 2000), the majority of them being Ethiopian citizens of 'Eritrean' origin. The Ethiopian government has faced severe criticism due to their policy of deportation, and Amnesty International has written that 'the expulsion of people of Eritrean origin was often carried out in an inhumane manner that amounts to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment'.[112] The TPLF/EPRDF government has defended its action by claiming that the deportees are alien citizens and that they are a threat to national security since Ethiopia is at war with Eritrea. They have denounced any international criticism on the matter and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi expressed on Ethiopian Radio on 9 July 1999 that the Eritrean deportees were 'foreigners', adding that:

> 'any foreign national, whether Eritrean or Japanese etc. [...] lives in Ethiopia because of the goodwill of the Ethiopian government. If we say "Go, because we don't like the colour of your eyes," they have to leave'.[113]

However, under international law, most of the Eritrean deportees are considered to be Ethiopian nationals. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council has explained:

> 'since the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea is being waged between people united by blood, culture, history and common struggles, it is a war among family members. And since a war among family members makes it difficult to distinguish between enemies and friends, this war becomes even uglier and sadder'.[114]

The statement gives a good description of one of the consequences of the war: the stigmatization and persecution of minority groups. In addition to Eritreans, other ethnic groups with political secessionist movements, most

notably the Oromo and Somali, have been targeted. Since the Ethiopian government claims that the OLF is collaborating with Eritrea, the TPLF/EPRDF has placed the Oromo people, particularly those living in areas of OLF activity, under even greater pressure than before. Moreover, in order to obtain control over the southern OLF and other south-eastern resistance movements' supply routes, the Ethiopian army has taken control of several border towns in Somalia and is clamping down on some Somali factions in the area.

The war has also changed the EPRDF's nationalistic rhetoric, which has turned from describing Ethiopia only as a 'territory hosting multiple nations and nationalities', to slogans reminiscent of the former regimes where 'Ethiopianess' and 'motherland' are symbolically projected. On 2 March 1999, commemorating the battle of Adwa, when Ethiopian forces defeated the Italian army thus securing independence, the battle of Badme in February 1999 when Ethiopian forces defeated the Eritrean army, was also celebrated. Some of the slogans to be seen on television and on the streets of Addis Ababa during the celebrations read: 'Unity is Power!', 'Heroism and Conquering – Unique Symbols of Ethiopianism', and 'Our Unity is Reflected by our Victory'.

Such changes may derive from the pressure of an external aggressor, as some tend to believe, or they may be the result of the 'new Ethiopia', as described by Ms Almaz Meko, speaker of the House of Federation:

> *'Even under the current crisis [the Ethiopian-Eritrean war] we see that our ethnic diversity has become a strength. Many believe that a strong sense of Ethiopianess has emerged after the outbreak of the crisis. In my opinion the strong Ethiopianess we see today is a result of over seven years of work. If someone says that this strong Ethiopia comes from Eritrean aggression, it is very difficult to accept that.'* [115]

Nevertheless, the general nationalistic mobilization in the wake of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war may make it harder still for ethnic groups to express concern over the policies of the central government, since this could be understood as anti-Ethiopian sentiments and regarded as an act of treason.

## Land rights

The land question has been in the forefront of Ethiopian political discourse during the transition both from the Emperor to the Derg, and from the Derg to the EPRDF. During the constitutional debate, land was one of the core issues and the EPRDF argued strongly in favour of state ownership, thus resulting in the controversial Article 40.3 in the Constitution:

> *'The right to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the State and in the peoples of Ethiopia. Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange.'*

The balance between the State's ownership rights and peoples' usufruct rights was not fully elaborated upon, and a decision on national redistribution of land was not formally sanctioned. Moreover, confusion surrounded whether it was the federal government or the regional states that had the power to initiate land reform. Therefore it came as a surprise when the Amhara regional state decided to implement land redistribution in 1996. So far the Amhara regional state is alone in having undertaken this endeavour, however, seemingly without any significant success. One of the few studies of the redistribution, carried out by Svein Ege, concludes that:

> *'the reform has considerably weakened the legitimacy of the government, it has put the peasant economy in a very uncertain state, and it has also contributed to a harsher political climate in many* qäbälés *[local administrative units]'.* [116]

Although pastoral rights to free grazing and cultivation land are enshrined in the Constitution, 'as well as the right not to be displaced from their own lands' (Article 40.5), tension exists due to agriculturists' encroachment on nomadic land. Population increase and growing urbanization within traditional pastoral regions are also sources of concern for the sustainability of traditional pastoral-nomadic activities. [117]

## Women

Gender roles and relations in Ethiopia are predominantly bound by tradition. Still, to a large degree, marriage and motherhood determine women's relationship to work, property and other matters of public importance, and define their status as political beings in society. Although the TPLF's war of resistance against the Derg also had the enhancement of women's rights in Tigray as an objective, this gender struggle had little impact on Ethiopia at large. [118] Since coming to power, however, the TPLF/EPRDF government has developed a national policy on women in Ethiopia and established a Women's Affairs Office with the rank of minister without portfolio within the office of the Prime Minister. Beyond this, few concrete measures to enhance women's rights have materialized. Therefore, women in Ethiopia are still a disadvantaged group in terms of social, cultural and structural discrimination. Indications of this are, for instance, the adult literacy rate which shows that only 29 per cent of women are literate, compared to 41 per cent of men, [119] and in the records of formal employment at all levels in government, women occupy only 9 per cent of the jobs. [120] In the Cabinet, there is only one woman heading a ministry (Education) and in politics in general, the speaker of the House of Federation is a lone woman among her male colleagues. This marginalization of women is still being reproduced, since girls are not given equal access to formal education by their parents. In primary education enrolment in the multi-minority SNNP, for instance, 63 per cent of the boys are enrolled, in contrast to only 31 per cent of the girls. [121] Girls are generally kept at home in order to assist in household chores, such as fetching water and firewood.

More recent studies of women suggest that they are negatively affected by the new ethnic federal system introduced in Ethiopia. The upsurge of ethnic consciousness after the introduction of the federal system may lead to the revival of certain traditional practices that discriminate against women, since these practices are seen as ethnic boundary markers by political manipulators. Therefore, even though the Ethiopian federal State discourages such practices, the regional states or ethnic groups may approve or allow them to be carried out. Tsehai Berhane-Selassie notes that among the particularly harmful practices which have reappeared are the abduction or kidnapping of brides and the reinstitution of forced marriage.[122] Other studies suggest that female genital mutilation (FGM), which is widely practised in Ethiopia, is also employed as such an ethnic boundary marker.

A recent study conducted on harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia estimates that about 72 per cent of the female population have undergone FGM, and that most ethnic groups inflict this custom upon girls. The age at which FGM is carried out varies according to the ethnic group, but it is generally performed on girls before they reach puberty.[123] Among the Amhara, it usually takes place on the seventh day after birth, while among other groups the operation is commonly undertaken between the ages of four and 10. There are reports, however, that FGM may also be carried out in adolescence or even at the time of marriage. Traditionally, the Afar and Somali practice infibulation, while the highland groups undertake clitoridectomy. There is also a distinction based on social class, and Simon Rye's recent study indicates that FGM is more common in poor sections of Addis Ababa than in wealthier residential areas.

The TPLF/EPRDF government seems to have resigned in the fight against FGM, and leaves the initiative to local and international NGOs and organizations – the National Committee on Traditional Practices (the Ethiopian wing of the Inter Africa Committee), UNICEF and UNFPA are the main actors tackling FGM. However, other traditional practices are considered just as important to combat as FGM, such as child marriage. FGM is not prohibited in the Ethiopian penal code, as child marriage is. It is prohibited to marry under the age of 15. However, girls are still commonly married at eight or nine in many regions.

# Language rights and education

To reform the educational policy has been a major objective of the TPLF/EPRDF government. Of particular interest for this Report is the government's recognition of the right of ethnic groups to learn in their own language and to develop a 'culture sensitive' curriculum, as explained by Minister of Education, Ms Gennet Zewdie:

*'Today we have a decentralized system of education. In the past it was centralized, regions or nations and nationalities had no right of saying on the development of the curriculum. Nor could they use their mother tongue to educate their children. Their cultural values, their identity, their nationality were not subjects of education. Their children were not given the opportunity to learn about their culture, identity, their psychological make-up […]. The curriculum was designed at the centre, the teachers were trained and deployed from the centre, the budget was allocated at the centre, and the construction of schools at any particular place was decided at the centre. So, everything was decentralized, in a sense that the people, the real people, was supposed to take advantage of education, either in their choice to where to build a school, choice of language, the substance of the curriculum, teaching their children about their cultural attitudes, and so on.'*[124]

The regional states today have full educational responsibility, but the selection of language of instruction is decided at the *zone* level. From grade three to 12 Amharic is supposed to be taught as the federal *lingua franca*. English is a foreign language from grade one, and is intended to be the language of instruction throughout Ethiopia from grade nine.

The regional governments in the multi-ethnic states are facing daunting challenges to implement the TPLF/EPRDF's programme of instituting peoples' first languages in government and educational institutions. For instance, due to the wide range of languages spoken in SNNP, Amharic is still the language of the state administration, although the region has 10 'national' languages as a medium of instruction and 11 more are used to produce the curricula in the region.[125] At the lower *zone* and *woreda* levels, Amharic is gradually being replaced by local languages as the authorities manage to develop written languages where these do not exist, translate and develop textbooks and administrative materials, educate and provide school teachers and instructors with the knowledge of the local languages, etc. All these practical factors mean, however, that it will take years before all the smaller groups practise their constitutional right of receiving education in their first language, even though the new educational system has devolved authority to the regional states to shape their own policies.

The placement of students in different institutions of higher education that are administered federally still shows that peripheral ethnic groups are being marginalized, even though the government has initiated some policies of affirmative action for students from disadvantaged regions. In a study conducted by the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, it is clear that students from the regional states of Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Somali and SNNP are under-represented in admission to institutions of higher learning in favour of urban students from Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and Harar.[126] Moreover, students from Tigray are slightly over-represented, while students from Amhara and Oromia regional states are slightly under-represented. Under-representation of students may, of course, be a result of the school system and lack of teachers, and/or a historical legacy which takes time to adjust. It is not necessarily a proof of discrimination. However, it should be of concern for the federal government that Somalis, for instance, accounting for some 3.2 million people in Ethiopia, had only 25 students in higher educa-

tion institutions in 1998. Likewise, from SNNP only 821 students were granted admission while the regional state has a population of over 10 million people from more than 50 minority groups.

# Economy

The natural and human resources controlled by the regional states vary considerably. It may be claimed that Amhara and Tigray generally have sufficient human resources to utilize their natural resources, whereas Oromia and SNNP have the potential to develop their human resources to a sufficient level in the near future. The smaller peripheral states, however, face severe problems in terms of shortage of skilled labour, a situation that affects the smaller ethnic groups predominantly found in these areas. The lack of capacity and human resources for self-sustaining administration in these states is evident, and two Ethiopian researchers offer the following comments on the issue:

> *'These problems [of lack of capacity] manifest and continue to manifest themselves in the form of wastage of scarce resources, inability to design and execute development projects, inability to put the right persons in the right positions. These problems often arise either from cronyism or the use of ascriptive considerations in the recruitment of persons to positions of power and influence.'*[127]

The federal government has, though, recognized these problems and taken action to rectify them by assigning federal experts to the regional states. Whether or not this is done with the full consent of the regional officials, has been questioned. The federal system, however, does not compensate for the unequal distribution of natural resources, which especially affects the marginal Afar and Somali states with a fragile agro-pastoral environment.

The right to self-determination under the federal system is also widely misunderstood to mean the total exclusion of people from other ethnic groups being able to enjoy the rights to live and work in a particular region. This further hinders the recruitment of the best personnel to professional jobs in the regional states, or means that specialized jobs are vacant since no local personnel are qualified. Moreover, in the first report made by the Office of the Auditor-General in 27 years, the lack of prompt decision-making and supervision was cited as having a significant impact on tax collection. The Auditor-General, Ato Lemma Argaw, also complained that certain states shunned auditors of the Office, alleging that they had no jurisdiction over regional state offices under the federation.[128] The lack of knowledge of how the federal system operates is widespread, and a broad-based civic education programme seems necessary in order to establish a more efficient economic development of the regions.

◗

# Conclusion: Promises unfulfilled?

The TPLF/EPRDF took power in 1991 based on a promise of change – no longer should the ethnic groups of Ethiopia feel oppressed and intimidated by a central government. However, to resume power and initiate political liberalization after a collapsing Marxist single-party government is a complex process. This is reflected in today's mixed experiences; in some sectors the EPRDF has achieved progress, in others there are few signs of improvement.

The major change during the TPLF/EPRDF's first period in office was the drafting of a new Constitution, and the reconfiguration of the unitary Ethiopian State into an ethnic federation. After the fall of the Derg, some kind of federal arrangement was seemingly the only solution to enable Ethiopia to stay together as one polity, with the exception of the independence of Eritrea. The EPRDF opted for an ethnic federal model, instead of federalism based on geographical regions as is conventional. Nevertheless, the new federal model has the potential to promote integration and diversity simultaneously, if the political climate is conducive, and mechanisms for checks and balances are developed. Currently, with mutual distrust between the government and the opposition, the outcomes from the Constitution may be counterproductive. Since an inclusive and broad-based democratization process has failed to materialize, a political stalemate has developed, with actors entrenched in defensive positions. The adversary is constantly suspected of hidden motives, and political machinations concentrate on delegitimizing the other, instead of providing constructive alternatives. Therefore, the danger is that a hostile political environment may turn the potentially positive elements of ethnic diversity into a destructive, centrifugal force threatening the very existence of a united Ethiopia. To turn political suspicion and distrust into dialogue and openness that might lead to an all-inclusive democratization process must therefore be given top priority from all political actors in the country.

The new Ethiopian Constitution has established an adequate judicial platform to turn the country into a place where peoples of various identities could coexist peacefully and constructively: Ethiopia as a mosaic – the bigger whole made up of several ethnic groups and minorities. Ms Almaz Meko, as speaker of the House of Federation, being the foremost political representative of the ethnic groups and minorities in Ethiopia, explains that:

'Without being proud of our ethnic identities, we cannot build a strong Ethiopia. I'm an Oromo and an Ethiopian. Today I can be both simultaneously, contrary to the past when we were forced to deny our first identity and to accept the second only.'[129]

The acknowledgement of ethnic identities and language rights is an admirable trait of the new system. However, the Constitution does not come without flaws. Paul Brietzke comments that:

'Like most constitutions, Ethiopia's new one presents its principles in a rather fragmented and undeveloped fashion. These principles could be developed further, politically and perhaps judicially, to achieve a better "fit" among the ideas embedded in the Constitution: democracy, a limited devolution of powers, self-determination and other human rights.'[130]

First and foremost, Brietzke is calling for a more realistic constitutional balance between the rights of self-administration and secession, and claims that the Ethiopian Constitution proposes too few intermediate solutions before secession is employed. This interpretation creates resonance among many Ethiopian thinkers of varying ethnic backgrounds, and even the former deputy secretary-general of the OLF, Lencho Lata, has reconsidered the position of an independent Oromia.[131] Therefore, if the TPLF/EPRDF fulfils the true intentions of the Constitution, and opens up a conducive political atmosphere with checks and balances, inspiring an all-embracing democratization process, current claims for secession from several opposition groups might diminish.

It is plausible to say that the main cause of 'political ethnicity' in Ethiopia today, i.e. political mobilization along ethnic lines, is the struggle for material and natural resources, and civil and political rights. Therefore, in order to take the destructive sting out of ethnicity in Ethiopian politics and society, it is vital to create a more equitable material and social distribution among, and within, the ethnic groups and minorities. Moreover, in order to defuse growing ethnic tension and claims of secession, the civil and political rights of citizens in Ethiopia must be protected and respected. The old political culture of intolerance must be replaced with a new political culture of tolerance, with effective means of accommodating the views of political adversaries. Not until the Ethiopian peoples may choose freely from a variety of political parties and candidates in open and free elections, may we see a stable and harmonious political development emerging; a development that will facilitate a peaceful coexistence of minority as well as majority ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

# Recommendations

## 1. Armed conflict

MRG urges the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea to end the current armed conflict, and to engage in constructive dialogue using appropriate mediators to resolve their differences. While conflict persists humanitarian and human rights standards, particularly those for the protection of civilians, should be respected at all times.

## 2. International standards

MRG welcomes Ethiopia's accession to a number of important international human rights and humanitarian instruments, and the incorporation of such standards into the federal Constitution. MRG urges the Ethiopian government to take immediate steps to implement national and international human rights standards. In particular, government officials should be made accountable for violations of such standards.

## 3. International community

The international community should monitor the implementation of human rights standards and engage in dialogue with the Ethiopian authorities on human rights concerns. For example, donor governments to Ethiopia are urged to raise human rights concerns with the Ethiopian authorities during bilateral and multilateral discussions on development aid and humanitarian assistance.

## 4. Democratization

It is essential that the democratization process is re-established and that the national elections to be held on 14 May 2000 for the councils of the federal states and the House of Peoples' Representatives are free and fair. The freedom of the press is crucial to the democratization process.

## 5. Pluralism

The Ethiopian government should take steps to create an open and pluralistic public environment and civil society, to include the rights of freedom of expression and assembly to be enjoyed by all.

## 6. Discrimination

The Ethiopian government should ensure the full enjoyment of human rights for all its citizens, without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, language or religion, etc. In particular, it should guarantee the free movement of individuals across regional and State borders regardless of their belonging to specific ethnic groups.

## 7. Judiciary

The Ethiopian government should take immediate steps to ensure the competence, impartiality and independence of the judiciary – free from political interference. Appropriate recruitment and training processes of the judiciary should be implemented, together with measures to ensure its accountability. The international community should support the Ethiopian authorities in undertaking these reforms by, for instance, providing technical assistance.

## 8. Social policies

The Ethiopian government should target its education, health and housing policies to ensure that the basic rights of the most marginalized and disadvantaged minorities are upheld, especially in the south of the country, and ensure that such policies are adequately funded. The international community, and specifically development cooperation organizations, should provide the Ethiopian government with the necessary material and other support.

◗

1	Until the advent of Italian colonialism in the late nineteenth century, Ethiopia (or Abyssinia as it was called), comprised the highlands of current-day Eritrea, Amhara regional state, Tigray regional state and parts of Oromia regional state. The term 'Abyssinia' will be employed to denote 'Ethiopia' before its international borders of 1906 were sanctioned. The term 'Ethiopia' will be employed to describe the country after the 1906 treaty, and Menelik's conquest of the western, southern and eastern regions. These terms are used for clarification only, and are not intended to denote any political significance.

2	According to Article 46.2 in the Constitution: 'States shall be delimited on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the peoples concerned.'

3	Firebrace, J. and Legum, C., *Eritrea and Tigray*, London, MRG, 1983.

4	Interview with the author.

5	See Rahmato, D., *Famine and Survival Strategies*, Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 1991, regarding the impact of famine in rural Ethiopia.

6	This table is based on the 1994 census and does not include several small ethnic groups. (Eritreans to Sudanese at the end of the table are not counted by the government as Ethiopians.)

7	For instance, the 1994 population census operates with 80 distinct groups and sub-groups in addition to 'Other Ethiopian National Groups'. (See FDRE Office of Population and Housing Census Commission, Central Statistical Authority, *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Summary Report at Country and Regional Levels*, Addis Ababa, 1998.) Yet, Donald N. Levine lists about 135 different groups and sub-groups in addition to a range of caste-groups. (See Levine, D. N., *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1974.)

8	See Appleyard, D., 'The languages of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Jubuti', in C. Moseley and R.E. Asher (eds), *Atlas of the World's Languages*, London, Routledge, 1994.

9	This Report uses the terms BCE and CE – before the Christian era and Christian era.

10	Aksum is the name of the state formation which developed in 100–800 CE, and later became Abyssinia/Ethiopia.

11	Kessler, D. and Parfitt, T., *'The Falasha: The Jews of Ethiopia'*, London, MRG, 1985.

12	See Kaplan, S., *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century*, New York, New York University Press, 1992. See also the 'Preface to the third edition' by Kessler, D., *The Falashas: A Short History of the Ethiopian Jews*, London, Frank Cass, 1996.

13	See news message from Reuters, 22 June 1999.

14	See Central Statistical Authority, *op. cit*. The estimate of the Oromo population is a highly politicized issue. The OLF, the principal Oromo political resistance movement, claims that the Oromo represent 'some 30 million, a good half of the total population of the Ethiopian state' (Oromo Liberation Front/Foreign Relations Committee, *The Oromo People in Search of Just Peace*, Washington DC, 1999, p. 4).

15	See Lewis, H. S., *A Galla Monarchy: Jimma Abba Jifar, Ethiopia 1830–1932*, Madison Wis., University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.

16	See Legesse, A., *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*, New York, The Free Press, 1973.

17	See Baxter, P.T.W., *et. al.* (eds), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*, Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 1996; and Jalata, A. (ed.), *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, Lawrenceville, NJ, Red Sea Press, 1998.

18	The salt-bars dug by the Afar in Danakil were once the currency of the region. The Afar are still the main providers of salt to much of the Horn of Africa.

19	See Nadel, S.F., *Races and Tribes of Eritrea*, Asmara, British Military Administration – Eritrea, 1944; and Lewis, I.M., *Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali, Afar and Saho*, (fourth edn), London, Haan Associates, 1998.

20	*Ibid*.

21	See Lewis, I.M., *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society*, Lawrenceville, NJ, Red Sea Press, 1994.

22	See Shehim, K., 'Ethiopia, revolution, and the question of nationalities: the case of the Afar', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1985, pp. 331–48.

23	See Gibb, C., 'Sharing the faith – religion and ethnicity in the city of Harar', *Horn of Africa*, vol. XVI, no. 1–4, 1998. See also Shack, W.A., *The Central Ethiopians: Amhara, Tigrina and Related Peoples*, London, International Africa Institute, 1974.

24	See Gibb, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

25	See Shack, W.A., *The Gurage: A People of the Ensete Culture*, London, International Africa Institute/Oxford University Press, 1966.

26	See Brøgger, J., *Belief and Experience Among the Sidama: A Case Study Towards an Anthropology of Knowledge*, Oslo, Norwegian University Press, 1986, pp. 24–7.

27	See Shack, *op. cit.*, 1966.

28	The information in this section is based mainly on the work of Hallpike, C.R., *The Konso of Ethiopia: A Study of the Values of a Cushitic People*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972.

29	See Appleyard, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

30	New research has been carried out by Jon Abbink and David Turton. Previous research is described in Cerulli, E., *Peoples of South-West Ethiopia and its Borderland*, London, International Africa Institute, 1956.

31	According to a list compiled by Levine, *op. cit.*, pp. 192–4.

32	See Turton, D., 'A problem of domination at the periphery: The Kwegu and the Mursi', in D. Donham and W. James (eds), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

33	*Ibid.*, p. 148.

34	See Turton, D., 'Mursi political identity and warfare: The survival of an idea', in K. Fukui and J. Markakis (eds), *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, London, James Currey, 1994.

35    See the 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia, *Results for the Benishangul-Gumuz Region, Summary Report*, and *Results for Gambella Region*, Central Statistical Authority, Addis Ababa, 1995.

36    See Hutchinson, S.E., *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War and the State*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996. However, this study is based on Sudan.

37    See Evans-Pritchard, E.E., *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, New York, AMS Press (reprint), 1977, and works by G. Lienhardt.

38    See Kurimoto, E., 'Politicisation of ethnicity in Gambella', in K. Fukui, *et. al.*, *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Kyoto, Shokado Book Sellers, 1997. The Derg regime also carried out resettlement schemes elsewhere, notably in the southern region.

39    See Sato, R., 'Christianization through villagization: Experiences of social change among the Majangir', in Fukui, *et. al.*, *op. cit*.

40    It was occupied by fascist Italy from 1936–41.

41    See Holcomb, B.K. and Ibsa, S., *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa,* Lawrenceville, NJ, Red Sea Press, 1990, for substantiation. This view is controversial and many consider it a politically developed thesis to give legitimacy to ethnically-based opposition against a unitary Ethiopia.

42    See Zewde, B., *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1974*, London, James Currey, 1991, pp. 31–5.

43    See Marcus, H.G., *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844–1913*, Lawrenceville, NJ, Red Sea Press, 1995, pp. 184–90, and Holcomb and Ibsa, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–6.

44    See Marcus, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

45    See Marcus, H.G., 'Motives, methods and some results of the unification of Ethiopia during the reign of Menelik II', in *Proceeding of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Haile Selassie University, 1969, pp. 273–4.

46    See Marcus, *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 193.

47    See OLF Foreign Relations Committee, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9.

48    See Marcus, *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 194.

49    See Chernetsov, S., 'On the origins of the Amhara', in *St. Petersburg Journal of African Studies*, no. 1, 1993.

50    See Rahmato, D., *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia*, Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 1984.

51    See Tola, B., *To Kill a Generation: The Red Terror in Ethiopia*, Washington DC, Free Ethiopia Press, 1997 (2nd edn), for an account of the atrocities.

52    See Tareke, G., *Ethiopia: Power and Protest, Peasants Revolts in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

53    See Young, J., *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975–1991*, Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 1997.

54    The origins of the EPDM go back to 1980, when a group of EPRP members defected and joined the TPLF. They first organized the EPDM as a multi-ethnic organization, but later it developed into a pure Amhara organization which became the ANDM in 1994.

55    At the same time the Ethiopian Democratic Officers' Revolutionary Movement was also organized and included in the EPRDF, composed of captured Derg officers. The organization was dissolved in 1994.

56    See the account of the last Derg ambassador to London, Teferra Haile-Selassie, who participated in the talks, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974–1991: From a Monarchical Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy*, London and New York, Kegan Paul International, 1997.

57    Lata, L., 'The making and unmaking of Ethiopia's Transitional Charter', in Jalata, *op. cit.*, 1998.

58    See Vaughan, S., *The Addis Ababa Transitional Conference of July 1991: Its Origins, History and Significance*, Occasional Papers no. 51, Centre for African Studies, Edinburgh University, 1994.

59    See Lata, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

60    See also Morrison, J.S., 'Ethiopia charts a new course', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1992, and de Waal, A., 'Ethiopia: Transition to what?', *World Policy Journal*, vol. ix, no. 4, 1992–3.

61    See Iyob, R., *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941–1993*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

62    See the Report of the Referendum Commissioner of Eritrea, *Referendum '93: The Eritrean People Determine Their Destiny*, Asmara, 1993. For an alternative analysis of the referendum process, see Tronvoll, K., 'The Eritrean referendum: Peasant voices', *Eritrean Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1996.

63    See de Waal, *op. cit.*, p. 722, and Lata, *op. cit.* pp. 61–3.

64    See Amnesty International, *Ethiopia Accountability Past and Present: Human Rights in Transition*, London, 1995, p. 15.

65    There are many more political groupings and movements in Ethiopia, but none claim to wish to control the State apparatus.

66    From Young, J., 'Regionalism and democracy in Ethiopia', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1998, p. 195.

67    See Pausewang, S., *The 1994 Election and Democracy in Ethiopia*, Human Rights Report no. 4, Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, University of Oslo, 1994.

68    *Ibid*.

69    See Tronvoll, K. and Addland, O., *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia – An Expression of Popular Participation or Political Resistance?*, Human Rights Report no. 5, Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, University of Oslo, 1995.

70    *Ibid*.

71    *Ibid.*, pp. 47–8.

72    From Proclamation no. 236 of 1983, 'A Proclamation to provide for the establishment of the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities', *Negarit Gazeta*, 23 March 1983.

73    Information given to the author by one of the members of the Derg's Constitutional Drafting Committee. See also Keller, E., 'Remaking the Ethiopian State', in I.W. Zartman (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder, 1995, pp. 130–1.

74    Term coined by Fasil Nahum in his book *Constitution for a Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect*, Lawrenceville NJ, Red Sea Press, 1997.

75    See Brietzke, P.H., 'Ethiopia's "leap in the dark": Federalism and self-determination in the new Constitution', *Journal of African Law*, vol. 39, no. 1, 1995, pp. 19–38.

76    The definition in the Constitution is virtually the same definition of a 'nation' within Marxist ideology, with the exception that Marxism states that a 'nation' will manifest itself at the rise of capitalism. Within Marxism 'nationalities' mean groups of peoples who have not yet been sufficiently economically interlinked and integrated to form a 'nation'. The TPLF/EPRDF concept of 'nations, nationalities and peoples' seems to be a hybrid category, giving reference to the Marxist past of TPLF/EPRDF, yet trying to distinguish it from the Derg's 1987 Constitution which establishes 'nationalities' as a constitutional terminology. From various Articles in the 1994 Constitution, however, it seems plausible to interpret a certain hierarchy between the three categories, since more rights are given to 'nations' and 'nationalities' than to 'peoples'.

77    Stated by Sebhat Nega, central committee member of the EPRDF and former leader of the TPLF, in an interview with the author, 17 June 1999, in Addis Ababa.

78    From Brietzke, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

79    The information on special *woreda/zone* was given to the author by Ato Deredje Assabot, deputy speaker of the House of Federation in an interview in Oslo, 28 August 1999.

80    Interviewed in Addis Ababa, 14 June 1999.

81    See Young, *op. cit.*

82    *Ibid.*

83    Interviewed in Addis Ababa, 14 June 1999.

84    See Cohen, J. M., '"Ethnic federalism" in Ethiopia', *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1995, pp. 157–88.

85    See Young, *op. cit.,* pp. 196–7.

86    High-ranking Ethiopian government officials and EPRDF cadres who have defected since 1991 have confirmed the existence of such a centralized TPLF system of control of the federal member states.

87    Personal communication with an Ethiopian representative working to educate regional state officials in the workings of the federal system.

88    See Gibb, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–1.

89    *Ibid.*, p. 151.

90    See *Tobia*, 1 April 1999 (23 Megabit [March – April] 1991), p. 17.

91    See Horowitz, D., *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985.

92    The information about this conflict was given to the author by several sources in Ethiopia. Space prohibits a more detailed explanation of the origin and unfolding of the conflict.

93    See Gebre Selassie, S. and Arsano Y., *The Challenges and Opportunities Presented by the Adoption of the Federal Structure in Ethiopia*, Paper presented at the Conference Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the Institute of Development Research of the Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 1999.

94    See Markakis, J., 'Ethnic conflict and the State in the Horn of Africa' in Fukui and Markakis, *op. cit.*

95    See Eriksen, T.H., *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, London, Pluto Press, 1993.

96    Brietzke, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

97    In 1993 Ethiopia acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (without the optional Protocols) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; in 1994 it acceded to the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its additional Protocols. The African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights was acceded to in 1999. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination had been ratified during the Derg regime (in 1981 and 1976 respectively).

98    Reports from both national and international organizations confirm human rights abuses. See, for instance, the Ethiopia section under Amnesty International, *Annual Report 1999*; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 1999*, and US Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998*. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued separate in-depth reports on Ethiopia, respectively, *Ethiopia Accountability Past and Present: Human Rights in Transition* (1995) and *Ethiopia: The Curtailment of Rights* (1997). Recently, Amnesty International issued *Ethiopia and Eritrea: Human Rights Issues in a Year of Armed Conflict* (1999) debating the abuses carried out in the wake of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war. Several Ethiopian organizations undertake human rights reporting, including the Ethiopian Human Rights Council.

99    From Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*

100   Cited from Oromia Support Group, *Press Release August – October 1999*, no. 29.

101   See the profile on Ethiopia by Siegfried Pausewang in P. Baehr *et. al.*, *Human Rights in Developing Countries Yearbook 1996*, The Hague, London, Boston, Kluwer Law International, 1996.

102   Amnesty International, *op. cit.*, 1995, and AAICJ; D.T. Fox, *Ethiopia, the Scheduled Elections May 1999*, New York, 1995.

103   International Transparency Commission on Africa, *Federal Ethiopia at Cross-roads*, 1995.

104   See statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Response to Amnesty International's Report of 21 May 1999 'Ethiopia and Eritrea: Human Rights in a Year of Armed Conflict'*, 4 August 1999.

105   Interviewed in Addis Ababa, 2 May 1997.

106   See Elgesem, F., *The Derg Trials in Context: A Study of Some Aspects on the Ethiopian Judiciary*, Human Rights Report no. 1, Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, University of Oslo, 1998.

107   From Ogaden Human Rights Committee, *Ogaden: Graveyard of Rights*, Godey, Ogadenia, 1999, p. 5.

108   *Ibid.*

109   UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

110   Interviewed in Addis Ababa, 14 June 1999.

111   'Is Ethiopia democratic?' in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1998, where P.B. Henze strongly defends the TPLF/EPRDF in his article 'A political success story' (pp. 40–54); whereas R. Joseph in 'Oldspeak vs. newspeak' (pp. 55–61) and J.W. Harbeson in 'A bureaucratic authoritarian regime' (pp. 62–9), reject Henze's analysis and severely criticize the TPLF/EPRDF government.

112   See Amnesty International, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 27. In the report, Amnesty also criticizes the Eritrean government's human rights record.

113   From Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.* However, other sources have modified their reporting to state that Meles said that Ethiopia would not actually express such sentiments.

114   From Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *The State of Human Rights in Ethiopia, 14th Report*, Addis Ababa, March 1999.

115   Interviewed in Addis Ababa, 16 June 1999.

116   From Ege, S., *The Promised Land: The Amhara Land Redistribution of 1997*, Working Paper no. 12 on Ethiopian Development, Trondheim, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 1997, p. 145.

117   See, for instance, Tilahun, T., *et. al.*, 'From communal grazing to privatised enclosures: a case study of changing land tenure in Region 5', in D. Rahmato (ed.), *Land Tenure and Land Policy in Ethiopia after the Derg*, Working Paper no. 8 on Ethiopian Development, Trondheim, The University of Trondheim, 1994.

118   Furthermore, despite women's active role in the war of resistance, women are not now allowed in the military.

119   See UNDP, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

120   *Ibid.*, p. 241. Women, however, are active in the informal economy, and as market traders, among other areas.

121   See Bekele, S., 'Implementation of new education policy in the south', *The Monitor*, 15 June 1999.

122   Berhane-Selassie, T., 'Women's rights in the militarized Ethiopian society', *Ethiopian Register*, May 1998, p. 31.

123   See Rye, S., *Men, Women and Female Circumcision in a Poor Community in Addis Ababa*, Ethiopia, PhD dissertation, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo, Oslo, 2000.

124   Interviewed in Addis Ababa, 16 June 1999.

125   See Bekele, *op. cit.*

126   See Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *25th Special Report Education and Development: The Right of Parents and Students*, Addis Ababa, April 1999.

127   From Gebre Selassie and Arsana, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

128   See interview in *Addis Tribune*, 23 April 1999, p. 3.

129   Interviewed in Addis Ababa, 16 June 1999.

130   Brietzke, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

131   See his statement in *Sagalee Haaraa* newsletter, no. 28, May – July 1999, p. 13.

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# Ethiopia:
# A New Start?

**D**espite having been equated with the ancient Abyssinian cultures of Amhara and Tigray for centuries, there are at least 80 different ethnic groups within Ethiopia. Until recently there has been little understanding of their cultures and traditions.

Ethiopia has traditionally been governed from the centre – one of the reasons for the growth of Eritrean nationalist movements, which led to the eventual independence of Eritrea. This centralization and oppression of different ethnic groups led to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coming to power in 1991, and promising that Ethiopia's peoples would no longer live under a centralized system, which oppressed the majority of the population.

The new government went on to restructure the State, forming an ethnic federation with regional ethnically-based states, and to create a most radical and progressive Constitution. The Constitution guarantees ethnic groups a wide range of rights – including secession from the ethnic federation.

Yet the government is beset by claims from opposition parties, and national and international human rights organizations, that it is guilty of widespread violations of human rights. Furthermore, many ordinary Ethiopians are sceptical of the government's agenda, questioning its commitment to promoting the rights of all ethnic groups.

MRG's Report **Ethiopia: A New Start?** analyses the Constitution, which the government has fashioned in order to create confidence among ethnic groups and minorities in Ethiopia. The Report discusses the Constitution's key points and focuses on implementation within the federation, assessing the claims of the government's detractors.

The Report's author, Kjetil Tronvoll, gives a balanced historical background to these issues, and covers some of the principal areas for Ethiopia's social, economic and political development. The Report concludes with a series of recommendations aimed at the Ethiopian government and the international community.

**An indispensable resource, which will prove of great value to academics, lawyers, journalists, development agencies, governments, minorities and all those interested in minority rights.**