

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

**Research Response Number:** ETH35004  
**Country:** Ethiopia  
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**Question**

**1. Please provide information on whether the Amhara people are harmed on the basis of their ethnicity.**

**RESPONSE**

**1. Please provide information on whether the Amhara people are harmed on the basis of their ethnicity.**

An RRT research response prepared in January 2006 provides background information on the situation of the Amhara in Ethiopia, including information on interethnic clashes in 2005, events relating to the May 2005 elections and information on ethnic federalism in Ethiopia (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response ETH31133*, 24 January – Attachment 1).

A recent RRT research response dated 14 April 2009 refers to treatment of the Amhara in the context of conflict between Tigrayans and other ethnic groups in Ethiopia (RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response ETH34682*, 14 April – Attachment 2).

The US Department of State report on human rights practices in Ethiopia for 2008 provides the following general background on ethnic groups in Ethiopia, including the observation that “[a]lthough many groups influenced political and cultural life, Amharas and Tigrayans from the northern highlands played a dominant role”:

There are more than 80 ethnic groups, of which the Oromo, at 40 percent of the population, was the largest. Although many groups influenced political and cultural life, Amharas and Tigrayans from the northern highlands played a dominant role. The federal system drew boundaries roughly along major ethnic group lines, and regional states had much greater

control over their affairs than previously. Most political parties remained primarily ethnically based.

The military remained an ethnically diverse organization; however, Tigrayans increasingly dominated the senior officer corps both through preferential promotions and heightened attrition among non-Tigrayans.

There were occasional reports that officials terminated the employment of teachers and other government workers if they were not of the dominant ethnic group in the region.

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EHRCO reported that ethnic conflict made up the majority of its human rights reporting this year. Ethnic conflict in the western, southern, and eastern areas resulted in killings and injuries above levels in 2007 and resulted in the death of hundreds and displacement of tens of thousands of persons. There were also clashes among ethnic groups in the Oromiya, Benishangul-Gumuz, and SNNP regions.

For example, on February 22, an Oromo student stabbed to death Zewdu Abate, an ethnic Amhara and fellow classmate at Dilla University in the SNNPR, allegedly due to ethnic tension. The suspect was in custody.

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During the year, the government, led by the EHRC, completed its first implementation report for the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The EHRC solicited input from NGOs and encouraged them to do a shadow report (US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Ethiopia*, February, Section 5 – Attachment 3).

The Human Rights Watch report on events in Ethiopia in 2006 reported police beatings of supporters of opposition parties in Amhara state:

Local officials used precinct (kebele) “social courts” run by government-party appointees without legal training to detain farmers who voiced support for recognized opposition parties. Local and regional officials also subjected the rural population to intense levels of surveillance. Farmers who were deemed politically unreliable were denied fertilizer and other agricultural aids over which the government exercises monopoly control; they were also subject to imprisonment for debt or eviction from their farms (the government owns all land). In Amhara state, kebele officials played key roles in identifying known or presumed supporters of opposition parties and led federal police to these persons’ homes at night, where the police beat and sometimes arrested them (Human Rights Watch 2007, *World Report 2007 – Ethiopia*, January – Attachment 4).

The Human Rights Watch report on events in 2008 noted generally that the “Ethiopian government’s human rights record remains poor, marked by an ever-hardening intolerance towards meaningful political dissent or independent criticism” (Human Rights Watch 2009, *World Report 2009 – Ethiopia*, January – Attachment 5).

Advice dated 14 November 2007 from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) directly addressed the question of whether Amharas were discriminated against in Ethiopia. According to DFAT:

This may depend on where they reside. It has also been widely rumoured that non-Amharas are promoted to top posts in government offices to ensure ‘ethnic diversity’. As Amharas had

been privileged during the Emperor's time, key government offices were naturally given to them then. Since the downfall of the Military regime over 15 years ago, the government in power has shown visible signs of discrimination in terms of making the Amhara region low development priority and discriminating against the Amhara intellectuals. It also happens to be that key opposition groups are led by Amharas including All Amhara Peoples' Organisation (AAPO), CUD and Ethiopian Patriotic Front (EPF) among others (DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No. 07/82 – CISQUEST 9137/8: Ethiopia: Country Information* (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 November 2007), 14 November – Attachment 6).

Most recently, a *BBC* article dated 6 May 2009 referred to the arrest in Ethiopia in April 2009 of 35 people who were members of the opposition group Ginbot Seven. According to the *BBC* report, "it is possible, if most of those arrested turn out to be Amharas, that the alleged plot and the subsequent arrests have an ethnic dimension":

The Ethiopian government has been asked by rights group Amnesty International to disclose the identity of 35 people arrested more than 10 days ago.

They were accused of plotting to overthrow the government.

The group says more people have been detained since, including an 80-year-old man in need of medical attention.

The government says those arrested were all members of the opposition group Ginbot Seven, founded by the exiled mayor of Addis Abba, Berhanu Nega.

The *BBC*'s Elizabeth Blunt in the capital, Addis Ababa, says he was one of the most charismatic opposition figures at the time of the last elections in Ethiopia in 2005.

He was arrested after the polls along with other prominent opposition figures and tried for treason, sentenced to life imprisonment, then pardoned and released.

Military affair?

Our correspondent says that despite the fact that those arrested were briefly produced in court soon after their arrest – only two names have been officially made public.

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According to local newspaper *The Reporter*, most of the military men arrested had previously been fighters with the Amhara armed group which helped bring the present government to power.

Our correspondent says it is possible, if most of those arrested turn out to be Amharas, that the alleged plot and the subsequent arrests have an ethnic dimension.

They used to be Ethiopia's dominant group, but have now lost influence to Tigreans from the north ('Ethiopia: Ethiopia asked to name "plotters"' 2009, *BBC*, 6 May – Attachment 7).

## List of Sources Consulted

### Internet Sources:

#### **Government Information & Reports**

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

#### **United Nations (UN)**

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/refworld/rwmain>

#### **Non-Government Organisations**

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch website <http://www.hrw.org/>

#### **Search Engines**

Copernic search engine <http://www.copernic.com/>

### Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

## List of Attachments

1. RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response ETH31133*, 24 January.
2. RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response ETH34682*, 14 April.
3. US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Ethiopia*, February.
4. Human Rights Watch 2007, *World Report 2007 – Ethiopia*, January.
5. Human Rights Watch 2009, *World Report 2009 – Ethiopia*, January.
6. DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No. 07/82 – CISQUEST 9137/8: Ethiopia: Country Information* (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 November 2007), 14 November. (CISNET Ethiopia CX188329)
7. ‘Ethiopia: Ethiopia asked to name “plotters”’ 2009, *BBC*, 6 May. (CISNET Ethiopia