



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Ethiopia

Ethiopia – ETH40215 – Eritrean Liberation
Front – Discrimination against Eritreans in
Ethiopia – Karchele prison

30 April 2012

1. What is the situation currently for ELF supporters in Ethiopia?

Limited information was located regarding the current situation for Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) supporters in Ethiopia.

In 2010, Country of Origin Research and Information (CORI) reported that Ethiopia and Eritrea “have supported the others’ rebel opposition groups operating in their own territory”. While no specific information was located suggesting that the Ethiopian government supports the ELF, Ethiopia continues to provide aid and support for Eritrean opposition coalition, the Alliance of Eritrean National Forces (AENF).¹ According to *BBC News*, former ELF factions account for the majority of the AENF.²

In 2008, the *Sudan Tribune* reported that “[e]ven Eritrean opposition organizations which have been politically divided for nearly a year long have pushed a new agreement to form a full coalition, the Eritrean democratic alliance (EDA), after 5 days meeting in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa”. After the agreement, alliance delegations were reportedly “met and congratulated by Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi”. Among the members of the EDA is the Eritrean Liberation Front, reportedly led by Hussein Khelifa.³

With regard to Eritreans in Ethiopia more generally, Refugees International noted that “[s]ome observers used the expression “my enemy’s enemy is my friend” to rationalize Ethiopia’s motivation to host Eritrean refugees”.⁴

According to the US Department of Homeland Security, the ELF is currently inactive. In 1970, “an internal ELF dispute led to the creation of a splinter organization, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF). Following the split, the EPLF would usurp the ELF as the primary insurgent group”. After the EPLF defeat of Ethiopian troops in 1991, the EPLF formed a provisional government in Eritrea, which was followed by the creation of a fully independent Eritrea after the 1993 Eritrean referendum.⁵

¹ Country of Origin Research and Information (CORI) 2010, *CORI Country Report – Ethiopia*, January, p.12

² Gilkes, P 2000, ‘Free rein for Eritrean opposition’, *BBC News*, 23 May
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/760503.stm>> Accessed 23 April 2012

³ ‘Eritrean opposition groups agree to form full alliance’ 2008, *Sudan Tribune*, 23 January
<<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article25679>> Accessed 6 August 2009

⁴ Refugees International 2008, ‘Stalemate Takes Toll on Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean Origin’, 30 May, Accessed 4 June 2008

⁵ US Department of Homeland Security n.d., ‘Terrorist Organization Profile: Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)’, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism website
<http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=310> Accessed 13 April 2012

According to a chronology of events provided by the UK Home Office in 2010, a civil war took place in Eritrea from 1972 to 1974 “between ELF and breakaway Popular Liberation Forces (which went on to form the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front [EPLF] in 1977)”. In 1985, a second civil war took place “between ELF and breakaway factions, leading to further splits from ELF, effectively neutralising it as an effective military force”.⁶

In 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) is Eritrea’s only authorised political party, and opposition groups have been driven into exile. To wit:

Opposition groups abroad, most of which are based in neighbouring Ethiopia and Sudan, are split into two major affiliations, namely (i) the Democratic Party, which has agreed a common set of objectives with two older parties (the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean Liberation Front-Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC, a splinter group of the ELF)); and (ii) the Eritrean National Alliance (ENA), an umbrella organisation consisting of several and varied opposition groups.⁷

According to a 2006 UNHCR report, despite the military defeat suffered by the ELF at the hand of the EPLF, “its political influence did not suffer to the same degree as its military hegemony”. The report noted that “many of the estimated 110,927 Eritrean refugees in Sudan at the end of 2005 were, in one form or another, associated with the ELF and splinter groups, and are reluctant to return to an EPLF-led Eritrea”.⁸

2. Are Eritreans currently subject to societal or systemic discrimination in Ethiopia?

Limited recent information was located as to whether Eritreans are currently subject to societal or systemic discrimination in Ethiopia.

In January 2010, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) released a report titled ‘The treatment of Eritreans by the Ethiopian government authorities (2008-2009)’. The IRB cited reports that indicated that as of 2008-2009, there were an estimated 30,000 to 42,000 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. The report noted information indicating that while Ethiopia welcomes Eritrean refugees, “Eritreans in Ethiopian society still face marginalization”, as well as “constant animosity from a large proportion of the population...[and] discrimination when dealing with lower-ranking public employees”.⁹

In 2010, the Cultural Orientation Center published a refugee background report titled ‘Eritrean Refugees from the Shimelba Refugee Camp’, which provided basic information on Eritrean Tigrinya and Kunama refugees from the Shimelba Refugee Camp in Ethiopia. According to the report:

...Ethiopian government policy prohibits camp residents from working for wages and restricts most of them to the camp. Refugees found outside the camp without permits have been arrested and imprisoned....

⁶ UK Home Office 2010, *Country of Origin Information Report – Eritrea*, 8 June, p.126

⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, April, p.20

⁸ Bariagaber, A 2006, *Eritrea: Challenges and Crises of a New State*, Writenet, UNHCR website, 1 October, p.5 <<http://www.unhcr.org/publ/RSDCOI/4538821e4.pdf>> Accessed 31 October 2007

⁹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010, *Ethiopia: The Treatment of Eritreans by the Ethiopian government authorities (2008-2009)*, ETH103319.FE, 14 January

Life for young people in the camp is difficult and sometimes dangerous. Without the opportunity to obtain an education beyond high school or learn a vocational skill, young men feel that their lives are passing by. Many of the young women in the camp live without the protection of parents or relatives. Some marry to gain protection from men, while others live alone or with other women.¹⁰

In 2008, the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) *World Refugee Survey* reported that new Eritrean arrivals to refugee camps “received four eucalyptus poles and a plastic sheet for shelter. Most Eritreans could use hospitals and other public services, but some local government officials reportedly denied medical services to indigent Eritreans”.¹¹

Also in 2008, Refugees International (RI) noted that some Eritreans living in Ethiopia “reported problems obtaining national identification cards, including 3-year delays and interrogation by immigration officials...Eritreans with Ethiopian citizenship said they still feel compelled to conceal their background, even among close friends”. RI further noted that Eritreans “rarely congregate as a community, nor are they politically engaged. Some spoke of employment discrimination”.¹²

According to *IRIN News* in October 2011, the Ethiopian government in 2010 “allowed Eritrean refugees to live in urban areas, a move intended to improve their access to services. The policy allowed more than 200 Eritrean students to continue their services in Ethiopian universities”. The opportunity to study in Ethiopia would be available to an estimated 700 additional Eritrean refugees in 2012, subject to an entrance examination”.¹³ Similar sentiment was expressed by the US Department of State, who noted that in October 2010, “the government announced a new policy that allows exiled Eritreans living in Ethiopia to become permanent legal residents of Ethiopia with full entitlement to public services”.¹⁴

In 2009, Forced Migration Review (FMR) reported that between 2000 and 2004, “individuals of Eritrean origin or from mixed families were allegedly arrested, detained and sometimes beaten or raped by Ethiopian authorities on suspicion of collaborating with or spying for Eritrea. FMR noted that in 2003, the Ethiopian government introduced a nationality proclamation enabling many Eritreans living in Ethiopia to re-acquire Ethiopian citizenship. As such, FMR suggested that by possessing a national ID card, “persons of Eritrean origin are presumably no longer restricted from work, travel, education and other social services. However, many individuals still conceal their Eritrean background for fear of discrimination and harassment”.¹⁵

¹⁰ COR Center 2010, ‘Refugee Backgrounder No 5: Eritrean Refugees from the Shimelba Refugee Camp’, Center for Applied Linguistics website, December <http://www.cal.org/co/pdf/files/backgrounder_shimelba.pdf> Accessed 16 April 2012

¹¹ US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2008, *World Refugee Survey – Ethiopia*, 19 June <<http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?id=2137>> Accessed 19 June 2008

¹² Refugees International 2008, ‘Stalemate Takes Toll on Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean Origin’, 30 May, Accessed 4 June 2008

¹³ “‘Silent crisis’ as more Eritreans flee’ 2011, *Integrated Regional Information Network*, 5 August <<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=93433>> Accessed 20 October 2011

¹⁴ US Department of State 2011, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Ethiopia*, 8 April, Section 2.d

¹⁵ Refugee Studies Centre 2009, ‘Forced Migration Review’, Issue 32, April, p.16 <[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/SHIG-7QWG78/\\$file/FMR_apr2009.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/SHIG-7QWG78/$file/FMR_apr2009.pdf?openelement)> Accessed 1 March 2011

3. Can you provide any information about Karchele prison?

Limited information was located regarding Karchele (variations Kerchele, Karchale) prison. As noted below, there is a Karchele Prison in Asmara, Eritrea; however, the Central Prison in Addis Ababa is also referred to as Karchele.

According to Amnesty International (AI), as of December 2005, “the Central Prison (known as *Karchele*) was in the process of being closed for demolition and the land transferred to the adjacent African Union headquarters for redevelopment”. AI further noted that as of April 2006, a recently transferred prisoner to the Central Prison was “detained there incommunicado in solitary confinement, raising fears about his treatment”.¹⁶ As of 2007, Karchele prison was reportedly still “in the process of demolition”¹⁷, while in 2005, *Addis Fortune* referred to households being resettled in “the Kerchele area, where the central prison used to be located”.¹⁸

In 2004, AI referred to “*Wenjel Mirmera*, (“special investigation”), a special security section in the 2nd police station in Asmara, which itself is known as *Karchele* (from *carceri*, the Italian word for prison)”¹⁹, while in 2009, AI noted that “[m]any prisoners were held in secret prisons and some in security prisons such as Karchele in Asmara”.²⁰

In 2006, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights noted that within Karchele prison, cells called ‘dark rooms’ have been used for “prisoners facing execution, but are also known to be used as punishment cells”.²¹ In 2007, the UK Home Office noted information indicating that “200 political prisoners on trial in the Addis Ababa federal system were held in two separate prisons, Kaliti and Kerchele, often under harsh conditions”.²²

While dated, relevant information from AI in 1991 noted that some political prisoners:

...were sentenced to specific periods of detention by secret committees and were then transferred to an official prison, such as the Central Prison (*Karchele*) in Addis Ababa...[t]here, official registers and prison “warrants” for individual prisoners were kept, but these merely specified the alleged offence of the detainee. Political prisoners had no opportunity to challenge the legal basis for their detention or to withdraw statements made under torture...²³

¹⁶ Amnesty International 2006, ‘Ethiopia: Prisoners of conscience on trial for treason: opposition party leaders, human rights defenders and journalists’, AI website, 2 May, p.20

<[http://web.amnesty.org/library/pdf/AFR250132006ENGLISH/\\$File/AFR2501306.pdf](http://web.amnesty.org/library/pdf/AFR250132006ENGLISH/$File/AFR2501306.pdf)> Accessed 3 May 2006

¹⁷ Amnesty International 2007, *Annual Report 2007 – Ethiopia*, AI website, 23 May, p.3

<<http://thereport.amnesty.org/en/Regions/Africa/Ethiopia>> Accessed 25 May 2007

¹⁸ Gebre M 2005, ‘Ethiopia: Maritime Enters Real Estate With Plan for 15-Storey Bldg’, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *Addis Fortune*, 11 September <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200509140694.html>> Accessed 17 April 2012

¹⁹ Amnesty International 2004, ‘Eritrea: ‘You have no right to ask’ – Government resists scrutiny on human rights’, AI website, 18 May, p.20

<[http://web.amnesty.org/aidoc/aidoc_pdf/nsf/Index/AFR40032004ENGLISH/\\$File/AFR6400304.pdf](http://web.amnesty.org/aidoc/aidoc_pdf/nsf/Index/AFR40032004ENGLISH/$File/AFR6400304.pdf)> Accessed 19 May 2004

²⁰ Amnesty International 2009, *Annual Report 2009 – Eritrea*, AI website, 28 May

<<http://thereport.amnesty.org/en/regions/africa/eritrea>> Accessed 29 May 2009

²¹ Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders 2006, ‘Ethiopia: The situation of human rights defenders from bad to worse’, OMCT website, December, p.23

<http://omct.org/pdf/Observatory/2006/report/ethiopia_obs463-2_1106_eng.pdr> Accessed 9 January 2007

²² UK Home Office 2007, *Operational Guidance Note – Ethiopia*, 4 April, p.9

²³ Amnesty International 1991, ‘Ethiopia and Eritrea: the human rights agenda’, AI website, November

A December 2005 AI report titled 'Eritrea: Religious Persecution' provided information regarding the detention in Karchele of a number of individuals, including religious figures, journalists and political prisoners.²⁴

²⁴ Amnesty International 2005, 'Eritrea: Religious Persecution', AI website, 7 December, <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGAFR640132005>> Accessed 9 December 2005

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<[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/SHIG-7QWG78/\\$file/FMR_apr2009.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/SHIG-7QWG78/$file/FMR_apr2009.pdf?openelement)> Accessed 1 March 2011.

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