

Guidelines for Writing Human Rights reports
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1. The report should be written to provide enough information for any client fleeing from that country, but the individual client's circumstances should still be kept in mind while writing the human rights report. Thus, if the client has evidence of beatings to the feet, look for reports about the prevalence of this particular technique of torture. If the client has experienced FGM, look for that in the human rights reports (how prevalent it is, who does it, what kind of people it is done to—ie women in general, women who spoke out against the government, etc). Nevertheless, include other forms of government abuse in the report, not just the ones that the client has been exposed to. This way, the same reports could be reused with perhaps a little bit of revision.
2. The typical human rights report can begin with a brief introduction into the country and then consist of the following subheadings
 - a. Context- a description of the government (perhaps its lack of democracy), a history of recent political developments, government forces, and possible political instability
 - b. Human Rights Violations
 - c. Forms of Torture
 - d. Concluding Remark—overview of the problem, refer to other authorities/international bodies condemning the situation
3. The report should be about 2-3 pages, as formatted in the sample reports you can download
4. Websites to refer to
 - a. State Department Background Notes: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/>
 - b. State Department Human Rights Reports: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/>
 - c. Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/> (see info by country section)
 - d. Amnesty International countries by region: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/engworld>
 - e. African Union Home page: <http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/index/index.htm>
 - f. African Commission on Human and People's Rights: http://www.achpr.org/english/info/news_en.html
 - g. CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>
 - h. BBC Country Profiles: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

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Human Rights Situation in Congo (D.R.C.) in Brief

Context

1. Joseph Kabila became the leader of Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa when his father, Laurent Kabila was assassinated in 1991. While Kabila has made progress in liberalizing political activity and reforming the economy, human rights violations persist, especially in the justice system and security services. [1] Security forces have committed unlawful killings, torture, beatings, rape, extortion, and the arbitrary arrest and detention of citizens. [2] Indeed, the United Nations Security Council reports, “Massive violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including massacres, summary executions, forced disappearances, abductions, arbitrary arrests, rape, and other forms of sexual violence and torture, have continued unabated despite political progress at the national level.” [3]
2. With a population of fifty-six million people, the government consists of judicial, executive, and legislative branches, but all legislative and executive power is vested in the president. In the executive branch, four vice presidents assist the president. [1] Influenced by the Belgian legal system, Congo’s judicial system has refused compulsory ICJ jurisdiction. [7] Moreover, as noted earlier, human rights abuses plague the judicial branch. [1] Since 2003, the country has had a transitional constitution, resulting from the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. Elections scheduled for 2005 or 2006 would mark the end of this transitional government. [1]
3. Since its independence from Belgium in 1960, Congo has faced continuous political instability. Within a year of the country’s inception, the army mutinied and the United Nations was called in to restore political order. In a coup, Mobutu took over the government. Laurent Desire-Kabila, in turn, supported by Rwanda and Uganda, took over the country in a military campaign. He changed the name of the country from Zaire to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Later, Congo’s relations with Zaire and Uganda deteriorated, causing another war. When Joseph Kabila succeeded his father, he fostered the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, resulting in peace and the creation of a transitional government. [1] Those with guns from the fighting, however, continued to kill, rape, and injure Congolese civilians. [4]

Human Rights Violations

4. Suppression of political dissent characterizes the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The State Department reports, “Harassment of journalists, human rights activists, and opposition politicians continued in government-held territory.” Security forces, in particular, arbitrarily arrested journalists and human rights advocates, using an obscure legal basis for justification. Evidence suggests that arbitrary arrests were “made to settle a personal score for a government official or member of the security services.” Security forces beat and tortured people to death as well. [5] They often whip their victims with cordelettes (military belts). [9] In one case in particular, Rwandan security forces arrested and severely beat human rights activist Richard Munhido “to a pulp,” according to Alison Des Forges, Senior Advisor to the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch

- reports, “They kicked him and beat him with clubs and rifle butts. When released later that day, he was vomiting blood and had open wounds on his back, buttocks, and mouth.
5. While journalists remain a major target of security forces, anybody practicing freedom of expression remains prone to physical attacks. Anybody who expresses dissent, not only political journalists, faces government-sponsored persecution. For example, soldiers with the Congolese army (FAC) beat a television journalist trying to record a football match. In Kinshasa, National police raided a radio and television station that mostly religious programming on June 10, 2003. [6] Whether on paper on the radio, perspectives not compatible with government positions face censorship, and the people who express these perspectives face persecution. Several politically active civilians “are charged with such catchall offenses as endangering the security of the state or “association with wrongdoers.” [8]
 6. Congo also fails to report on its effort or lack thereof, to improve human rights conditions. Despite its membership to the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, Congo still owes the African Commission six overdue reports. As of 2001, the nation has not turned in a single report. [11]

Forms of Torture

7. Despite the government’s official position against torture, security forces and prison officials tortures civilians and beats detainees. The government, however, failed to respond to these charges of abuse and human rights violations. The police, military, and security forces also committed acts of rape, robbery, and extortion. [5] In addition to whippings, security forces also used psychological torture frequently, with death threats and mock executions [9]
8. The United States State Department consider Congolese prison conditions to be “harsh and life threatening [5], and Amnesty International calls these conditions “appalling.” [9] Poor prison conditions, which the United States State Department considers “harsh and life threatening” exacerbate the situation in Congo. Prison facilities generally lack toilets, mattresses, and medical care. Prisoners also face a shortage of light, air, water [5], and food. [9]

Concluding Remark

9. The Congolese government itself, in addition to foreign governments and rebel groups, violate human rights. Violence, injustice, and denial of basic rights are systematized into the government—the very agent that is supposed to secure national tranquility. Violations, from the regime of Joseph Kabila and its predecessors, have earned the Congolese government notoriety among other nations and admonishment among its people. The government, for selfish interests, equates freedom of expression with national security risks.

Notes

1. U.S. Department of State, Background Note: Democratic Republic of Congo—October, 2003 (Accessed February 20, 2004).
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2823.htm>
2. U.S. Department of State, Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2002 -2003

- <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/shrd/2002/21765.htm>
3. U.N. Security Council, Fourteenth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 17 November 2003 <http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/615/41/IMG/N0361541.pdf?OpenElement>
 4. Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Overview: Democratic Republic of Congo <<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2003/12/31/congo7003.htm>>
 5. U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Democratic Republic of Congo (2002)—March 31, 2003 <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18177.htm>>
 6. Human Rights Watch, Recent Attacks on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Assembly in the DRC <<http://hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/drc072403.htm>>
 7. Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook: Congo, Democratic Republic of the (2003)—December 18, 2003 <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cg.html>>
 8. Human Rights Watch, Casualties of War: Civilians, Rule of Law, and Democratic Freedoms, Democratic Republic of Congo (1999) <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999//congo>>
 9. Amnesty International, Report 2003: Congo (Democratic Republic of the) <<http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/Cod-summary-eng>>
 10. Human Rights Watch, D.R. Congo: Activist Beaten “To a Pulp” <<http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/Cod-summary-eng>>
 11. African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, Fourteenth Annual Activity Report of the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (2000-2001) <www.achpr.org/14th_Annual_Activity_Report-AHG.pdf>

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Human Rights Report for Togo, In Brief

1. Togo, a country in Western Africa, has strained relations with the United States because of human rights violations and lack of progress toward a democracy. With a history of unstable governments, “frequent political paralysis,” and “intermittent violence,” the government still has not completed its democratic transition. The State Department of the United States reports that the country’s

democratic institutions are still “nascent and fragile.” [1] Even when the law protects individuals, the government lacks enforcement. The U.S. Department of State reports, “Although mechanisms for redress existed within formal judicial structures, police were not given any authority to protect women in abusive situations, and women were not made aware of the formal judicial mechanisms that would give them protection.” [2]

The Context

2. Ghana, Burkina Faso, Benin, and the Gulf of Guinea make Togo a landlocked country. In a country slightly smaller than the size of West Virginia [3], Togo’s population is made up of approximately 21 ethnic groups. [1] The Central Intelligence Agency’s population estimates of 5,429,299 “explicitly takes into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS.” [3]
3. Togo gained its independence as a republic from a French-administered UN trusteeship in 1960, but the nation still has trouble instituting democratic changes. Earlier, in a 1956 referendum, the approved constitution set the framework for the new government: the prime minister’s executive branch responsible to the legislature, an elected body with “considerable power over internal affairs.” [1] Although the election of President Sylvanus Olympio suggested a peaceful transition to independent government, he was later assassinated, and political insecurity followed. Nicholas Grunitzky took power, but when his government became insecure, Lt. Col. Etieene Eyadema (later Gen. Gnassingbe Eyadema) ousted him in a bloodless military coup.[1]
4. Eyadema banned political parties except for his newly created Assembly of the Togolese People (RPT), and he suspended constitutional government. Still, in 1979, Eyadema declared “a transition to greater civilian rule with mixed civilian and military cabinet.” Although the “national conference,” consisting of Eyadema’s opponents, tried to effect democracy, political paralysis followed. “In January 1993, President Eyadema declared the transition at an end.” [1] Today, with strong support from the armed forces, Eyadema dominates “all levels of the country’s highly centralized government.” [2] The army, navy, air force, the Surete Nationale (including the national police), and the Gendarmerie make up the country’s security forces, infamous for its human rights violations.” [2]

Human Rights Violations

5. With approximately one out of every ten women being victims of wife beating, Domestic violence against women is an incessant problem in Togo. Especially in the case of women’s rights, there is a discrepancy between the law that is written and the law that is enforced. The U.S. State Department reports, “Although mechanisms for redress existed within formal judicial structures, police were not given any authority to protect women in abusive situations, and women were not made aware of the formal judicial mechanisms that would give them protection.” [2] Consequently, the domestic violence problem runs unchecked—police do not have the power to protect.
6. Female Genital Mutilation, particularly excision, is practiced throughout Togo, although it remains illegal. This problem is most acute in rural areas because “neither the victims nor the police know the law;” people follow traditional customs instead of the law. [2] Traditional law, which also permits polygyny, remains a major source of discrimination against women. Because of traditional law, a wife has no child support rights upon divorce or separation, nor

inheritance rights upon the death of her husband. Moreover, a husband can legally restrict his wife's freedom to work and control her earnings.

7. Not only does the government remain negligent, but in other cases, it actively commits violence against women and other human rights crimes. The security forces, the Gendarmerie, and militias affiliated with the authorities rape and abduct women. They also commit extrajudicial and arbitrary executions, torture, and ill treatment of prisoners. [4]

Concluding Remark

8. Violence against women, human rights violations, and other forms of inhumanity, should not be tolerated by any government, and governments certainly should not commit these horrendous acts themselves. The United Nations' *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* encourages states to "exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons" in Article 4, section c. [5] Legislation does not suffice, for Togo should back up its laws with enforcement. Even setting up "mechanisms for redress" does not suffice since rural Togolese women are not educated on their rights [2], as the UN's declaration says that "states should also inform women of their rights in seeking redress through such mechanisms" in Article 4, section d. [5] This document states that eliminating violence against women is "a commitment by States in respect of their responsibilities, and a commitment by the international community at large to the elimination of violence against women." [5]

Notes

12. U.S. Department of State, Background Note: Togo—November, 2003 (Accessed March 26, 2004)
< <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5430.htm> >
13. U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Togo—2002 (Accessed March 27, 2004)
< <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18231.htm> >
14. Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook: Togo—2003 (Accessed March 27, 2004)
< <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/to.html> >
15. International Commission of Inquiry for Togo (Ordered by United Nations and the Organization of African Unity), Report of the International Commission of Inquiry of Togo—26 December 2000 (Accessed March 28, 2004)
< <http://www.diastode.org/Droits/un2000.html> >
16. United Nations General Assembly, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women—20 December 1993 (Accessed March 27, 2004)

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Human Rights Situation in Kenya in Brief

Context

10. A strong president and a parliament dominate the Kenyan government. The president holds power over the military, judiciary, civil service, and all localities. [6] The judiciary is extremely corrupt, and instabilities in the process of constitutional reform have given the executive considerable power to interpret laws. [5] The primary purpose of the Kenyan police force, namely the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), is to, in cooperation with the National Security Intelligence Service (NSIS), “monitor persons whom the State considers subversive.” [5] The lack of oversight, however, has allowed considerable human rights abuses, committed by the Kenyan police, to continue. [5] Most police committing abuses are neither investigated nor arrested, and continue to violently quell political dissent, preventing citizen-based reforms of the government. [5]
11. Although a regime change in 2003 brought about hope for human rights reforms in Kenya, many alarming issues remain. The police retain powers to arbitrarily arrest and detain citizens and the process of constitutional reforms to include human rights provisions continues to be stalemated by Parliamentary opposition. [1] In addition, measures taken by the current regime fail to be implemented by localities and the government bureaucracy. [6]

Human Rights Violations

12. Thousands of refugees are “being subjected to beatings, sexual violence, harassment, extortion, arbitrary arrests and detention” by the Kenyan police. Many members of these displaced populations are women and children. Others, suspected human rights activists, are publicly beaten and denied legal protections. Aid donors are failing to direct funds towards addressing these abuses. [3] Despite incentives by the current Kenyan administration to decrease police violence, it continues unabated. [6]
13. The government fails to respond to human rights abuses against women and children, despite constitutional safeguards. Despite legal prohibitions, significant numbers of women are subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM), while their children are subjected to prostitution, and made uniquely susceptible to the spread of HIV/AIDS through widespread sex trafficking, which has increased under the current regime. [6] Forced child labor in many sectors remains a problem. [5] Children also face widespread mutilation, as many are killed and sold for body parts associated with traditional rituals. [5] Hundreds of women are raped by the police, and countless others by their spouses. Kenyan law does not recognize spousal rape as a crime, and domestic violence is a common practice. [5] The nation’s largest and most powerful human rights organization focusing on women’s issues, Development of Women, is strongly associated with the powerful political party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). [5] The current National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), led by President Mwai Kibaki, has done little to protect the status of women. [6]
14. Kenyan women are legally prevented from private property ownership, especially after divorce. To maintain their property after their husbands’ deaths, they are forced

- to marry other men in the family and are often subject to sexual abuse. [2] The lack of property rights is alarmingly increasing the rate of HIV/AIDS spread, and depriving women and children of the necessary funds for medical care and prevention of further spread of the disease. [4] Women also face a considerable income gap compared to men, and those who find difficulty in economically supporting themselves are often driven to prostitution, especially if they have left their families or are divorced. [6]
15. The Kenyan government continues to curtail human rights by preventing free assembly by party leaders, political dissenters, or religious groups; publicly criticizing non-governmental human rights organizations; discriminating against the disabled; and provoking ethnic violence. [5] Extra-judicial killings are pervasive, and individuals are often arrested, beaten, and murdered without fair trial. [5] Examples abound: Philip Machau was beaten to death after stealing a piece of second-hand clothing; Philip Kirui died en route to a hospital after being tortured to near-death in prison; Sophia Mbogo, a pregnant woman, died after being beaten by local police; countless others have disappeared after police arrests. [5] Few efforts have been successful in scrutinizing and penalizing police abuses. [6]
 16. Lack of government enforcement has been a significant factor in the lack of human rights in Kenya. Although the new parliamentary government under the Rainbow Coalition established a new Commission on Human Rights, nothing has been done to jump-start the activities of the Commission. [7] The lack of government legitimacy in addressing human rights concerns has caused many, especially women, to avoid filing complaints. [8] Police have continued to arrest citizens under the auspices of conducting a 'War on Terror,' which has increased the number of extra-judicial arrests and killings in the name of national security. [8]

Forms of Torture

17. Despite the government's official position against torture, security forces and prison officials torture civilians and beats detainees. The government, however, fails to respond to these charges of abuse and human rights violations. The police, military, and security forces also commit acts of rape, robbery, and extortion. [6]
18. The United States State Department considers Kenyan prison conditions to be "harsh and life threatening." [5] Poor prison conditions exacerbate the situation in Kenya. Prison facilities generally lack toilets, mattresses, medical care, light, air, water, and food. [5] Prisons are especially susceptible to infectious disease spread. [5] Prisoners are often kept in solitary confinement for over 90 days, and tortured with electric shocks to the genitalia and by being placed in flooded cells. [6] Overcrowding has forced over 40,000 prisoners to share spaces intended for a total of 15,000 individuals. [6] Hundreds of prisoners, according to the United States State Department, have "died in... primarily as a result of pulmonary tuberculosis, gastroenteritis, pneumonia, and malaria; dysentery, anemia, malaria, heart attack, typhoid fever, and HIV/AIDS also were common causes of death among prisoners." Government measures to resolve prison abuses have failed to be implemented by prison magistrates. [6]

Concluding Remark

19. The Kenyan government violates human rights, and condones such violations through the lack of adequate reforms in its police force and judicial system. Violence,

injustice, and denial of basic rights are systematized into the government—the very agent that is supposed to secure national tranquility. Violations, remaining from the twenty-five year regime of Daniel Arap Moi, have earned the Kenyan government notoriety among other nations and admonishment among its people. The current Coalition regime, despite attempts at reform, remains paralyzed in legislative gridlock and has done little to address conditions, such as poverty, excessive presidential control, and the lack of individual rights, which underlie many of Kenya’s instabilities.

Notes

17. Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Overview: Kenya—January, 2004 (Accessed November 7, 2004). <<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2003/12/31/kenya7271.htm>>
18. Human Rights Watch, Women’s Property Rights Violations in Kenya, April 2004 (Accessed November 7, 2004)
<<http://www.hrw.org/update/2003/04.html#9>>
19. Human Rights Watch, Kenya, Uganda: Urban Refugees Refused, Press Release, November 21, 2002 (Accessed November 7, 2004)
<http://hrw.org/press/2002/11/kenya1121.htm>
20. Human Rights Watch, Kenya, Uganda: Bush Should Act on Women and AIDS, October 6, 2003 (Accessed November 7, 2004)
<<http://hrw.org/press/2003/10/kenya106003-ltr.htm>>
21. U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Kenya, February 23, 2001 (Accessed November 7, 2004)
< <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/841.htm>>
22. U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Kenya, February 25, 2004 (Accessed November 7, 2004)
<<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27733.htm>>
23. Amnesty International Report, Kenya, January-December 2002 (Accessed November 7, 2003)
<<http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/ken-summary-eng>>
24. Amnesty International Report, Kenya, January-December 2003 (Accessed November 7, 2003)
< <http://web.amnesty.org/report2004/ken-summary-eng>>

Ethiopia’s Human Rights Situation in Brief

1. Human rights violations in the Federal Republic of Ethiopia in the past two years have been described recently as “particularly egregious,” or unusually bad (1), especially in the Oromiya, the most populous of Ethiopia’s states. The situation has been marked by massive arbitrary arrests and detention under horrific conditions, torture, rampant shootings and extra-judicial killings. While the government authorities, security forces and “liberation fighters” have been the major perpetrators, ethnic conflicts fueled by land claims and political interests have

also contributed immensely to the decimal record.

Context

2. Officially known as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia since 1994, the country is located on the horn of Africa. It is one of the oldest countries in the world. It has a population of about 68 millions with the following ethnic composition: Oromo 35%, Amhara 30%, Tigre 6.3%, Somali 6%, Sidama 6%, Gurage 4%, Wolaita 4%, Afar 2%, and other nationalities 6.7%.

(2).

3. Its political history shows that it has been an imperial monarchy governed by kings, queens and Emperors; a military/socialist dictatorship and now a republic with the traditional three branches of government. The president, prime minister and house of parliament are elected. The judiciary is supposed to be independent, but in practice, it is subservient to the executive. It is weak and overburdened. (3). Other factors that further shape the human rights situation in Ethiopia includes the conflict between the government and the liberation movements, especially the major ones, viz: the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in the most populous state in Oromiya, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and the Somalia-based Al'Ittihad Al'Islam (AIAD).

Human Rights Violations

4. In a historical context, generally human rights respect in Ethiopia was never really concern under the imperial/monarchial and socialist totalitarian regimes. The situation took a turn for the worst under the communist totalitarian regime that emerged victorious after the chaos following the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie. The Haile Mariam Mengistu communist dictatorship thousands of alleged enemies of the regime were tortured and killed in a purge that came to be known as the "red terror" in the late 1970s. (4). The Federal Democratic Republic that came into existence in 1994 brought hope of change. The term "democratic" in the formal name of the country seemed to send an overt signal that the principles of democratic governance entrenched in the constitution including the respect of human rights would henceforth be respected. But the theory and practice are still very much at variance.

5. Basic human rights principles, including those that pertain to the respect of the dignity and integrity of the person, are violated with impunity. Security forces, including the military and the police, massively subject individuals to arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, extra-judicial execution, disappearances, denial of fair and public trials, interference with privacy and family as well as torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment. The government rarely intervenes to halt the violations or bring the

perpetrators to justice.

6. Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council and the US Department of State, have documented the violations in great detail in their recent reports. (5) In its 2003, Amnesty International (AI) reported that “police shot dead over 230 people and detained several hundred more in Oromiya and Southern Regions in connection with demonstrations that were mostly peaceful.” The same report indicated that many human rights violations including torture, rape and extra-judicial execution were reported, particularly in conflict zones in the Oromia and Somali regions. Still in the Oromia region, several thousand people were held in long-term detention without charge or trial on suspicion of supporting armed opposition groups. Some of the people were beaten, tortured, maltreated, held incommunicado and accused of links with the OLF. (6).

7. Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that those arrested were subjected to prison conditions that did not meet “international standards” and some prisoners, particularly in Oromiya regional state, were tortured, yet neither the courts nor parliament intervened to stop the abuses. (7). The same report stated that on May 24, “soldiers using machine guns mounted on armored cars” shot into a crowd of farmers in the city of Awassa protesting a change in the administrative status of the city. According to the report, 25 civilians were killed and 26 injured. Other killings by government forces contained in the HRW report include more than 118 civilians and one police officer in the town of Tepi when members of minority ethnic groups clashed with local authorities and the police over political rights; 40 students during a strike at the Addis Ababa University, five high students killed and a dozen wounded when police shot into a crowd of students in Oromiya protesting government educational and economic policies. The Oromiya state minister for capacity building, who fled the country in May 2002, denounced the state government for indiscriminately accusing the Oromo people of supporting the OLF. (8).

8. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council, the most prominent human rights organization in Ethiopia, published on May 19, 2003, its 19th Regular Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia listing, among other violations, the names, photographs, places of residents and occupations of some of the victims of extra-judicial executions in the country. (9). The report also included the shootings and arrests in Tepi, Awassa and Oromiya, 484 refugees who died because of medical treatment, abduction, rapes of women by government armed men, arbitrary arrests and detention, and victims of threats, intimidation and 67 victims of beatings and torture. (10)

9. The US Department of State reported in its 2002 report on human rights practices in Ethiopia that the “security forces” committed many unlawful killings, including some alleged political killings. According to its estimates the number of unlawful killings was between “1,000 and 1,500”. It stated further that there continued to be rumors of unlawful killings by government forces from Oroma and the Somali regions. The killings included those committed during the pre- and post periods of the 2000 national and 2001 regional elections in the country. Other violations related to the elections included disappearances, voter intimidation and harassment and unlawful detention of opposition party supporters. Local ruling political officials were reported to have incited violence between the Deresha and Zaise ethnic groups that resulted in the death of several persons. (11)

Forms of Torture

10. Of forms of torture documented in reports documenting human rights violations in Ethiopia, shootings and killings seem to be commonplace and rampant. In deed, there seems to be a persistent patent of killings committed, especially by the security forces, dating back to the days of the “red terror” in the late 1970s.

11. All the reports cited in this brief have documented violence, excessive use of force; sever beatings, mistreatment and torture. Individuals are beaten in the process of arrests, interrogation and in detention. The 2002 report of the Department of State enumerated some of the incidents of torture, beatings and abuse of persons by the security forces, noting that the government took no action about them. The incidents included the following: the injuring of about 20 persons when government soldiers attempted to restore order after a riot broke out between Muslims and Christians in Harar; the beating and injuring of at least 253 people in April 2001 during demonstrations at the Addis Ababa University (AAU), the beating of women and children by officer who forcefully entered their homes during the AAU demonstrations; the beating of students and opposition party members detained in connection with the AAU demonstrations and the beating of a group mothers who were attempting to visit their children in detention at Sendefa. The report also documented the case of an Oromo student activist, Gelan Nedhi Chewaka, who was dragged from his dormitory at the University of Mekelle on December 30, 2002 at night and beaten until he lost consciousness and was left for dead on the campus but fellow students discovered him. (12).

12. Prison conditions are used to inflict both

physical and mental torture. The 2002 report of the Department of State reported poor prisons including overcrowding that compelled poor meals costing about 25 cents per prisoner per day, unsanitary conditions, unreliable medical care, and the rule that all prison letters must be written in Amharic which made it difficult for non-Amharic speakers to communicate (13). HRW reported that prisoners reported having seen deaths of other prisoners with serious diseases such as tuberculosis. The report further stated that prisoners were denied access to bathing facilities, mattresses and blankets. According to the report, some prisoners released in 2002 told of being detained in such crowded confinements that they had to take turns sleeping (14). The 2003 report of AI documented ill-treatment of prisoners including incommunicado detention without charge or trial especially of those suspected of links with the OLF and ONLF.

13. Other methods of torture documented included raping of women accused of involvement with armed opposition groups; shackling of political prisoners while in solitary confinement, intimidation by authorities, forcefully rounding up street children and dumping them in remote forests, threats of dismissal or withholding salaries for those not dissociating themselves from supposed opponents of the regime, harassment of detainees or prisoners who are released by a court only to be rearrested and jailed with a day or two outside the jurisdiction of that court. HRW cited the example of a businesswoman, Dinkinesh Deressa Kitila, arrested in Addis Ababa accused of carrying OLF documents in her car. A local court ordered her release on bail after two months of detention for lack of evidence, but she was rearrested after two days was rearrested in another district (16).

Concluding Remark

14. Impunity reigns in the violations of human rights by authorities and security forces in Ethiopia as the government, especially the judiciary, appear incapable or unwilling to do anything about the situation. Blatant violations of basic individual rights are commonplace. Shootings, killings, beatings during arrests and in detention, ill treatment, rape, and torture are committed with impunity. The civilians of the Oromo people, who constitute the majority ethnic group in a system dominated by the Amhara and Tigre groups, seem to be particular targets, because of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fighting for the liberation of that region. The minister of capacity building of that region fled the country and denounced the state government of indiscriminately accusing the Oromo people of supporting the OLF.

Notes:

1. Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2003; Africa: Ethiopia," p.2; <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k3/africa5.html>
2. US Department of State, "Background Notes: Ethiopia," (Bureau of African Affairs, Washington, DC, May 2003), p.1; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm>
3. US Department of State, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices –2002: Ethiopia," (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Washington, DC, March 31, 2003), p.1; <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18203.htm>
4. US Department of State, Background Note: Ethiopia, p.3
5. Amnesty International, AI Report 2003:Ethiopia, <http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/eth-summary-eng>; Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRC), The Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia 19th Report, <http://www.ehrco.net/about/>; Human Rights Watch, World Report; Africa: Ethiopia, US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2002: Ethiopia
6. AI, 2003 Report: Ethiopia, pp.1 & 3
7. HRW, World Report; Africa: Ethiopia
8. Ibid, pp.1 & 2
9. Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia 19th Report
10. Ibid, p.1
11. US Department of State, Report, pp. 2, 20 &27
12. Ibid, p.5
13. Ibid, p.6; Amharic is the language of the second largest group in the country that dominates the government, and it is used as the official language.
14. HRW, World Report; Africa: Ethiopia, p.3
15. AI, 2003 Report: Ethiopia, p.3
16. HRW, World Report; Africa: Ethiopia, p3

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