

Jubilee Campaign – UPR Submission -- Ethiopia

Jubilee Campaign in special consultative status with ECOSOC, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in Ethiopia as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Religious Freedom

1. The Ethiopian government officially recognizes only two religions: Islam and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. All other religious groups are required to register with the Department of Justice in order to obtain legal standing. If a religious group wishes to participate in any type of development activity, it must also register with the Charities and Societies Agency.
2. According to the U.S. Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, Ethiopian religious groups required to register with the government reported incidences of discrimination in the registration process as well as when attempting to buy land for churches and cemeteries.
3. The constitution protects religious freedom, and Muslims and Orthodox Christians live alongside one another in relative peace. There are, however, ongoing reports of religious persecution, particularly against Evangelical Christians by both Orthodox Christians and Muslims. Further, according to the U.S. Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012 and its International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, arbitrary detainment and arrest is common across Ethiopia. Officials often arrest alleged political and religious dissidents under claims that they have violated the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation.
4. In July 2013, evangelical Christian Debela Mergesa was attacked and killed by Islamic extremists in Ethiopia following dozens of death threats when he refused to stop preaching the evangelical Christian gospel. Blog post, “When Your Community Turns Against You,” Open Doors, July 4, 2013.
5. In March 2013, Ethiopian local police arbitrarily detained Ethiopian Christian evangelist Alemayehu Legese for owning literature that discussed Islam from a Christian perspective. He was charged with having violated the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. As of June 2013, he remained in police custody. Though the court ordered that the charges of “terror and treason” be modified, the prosecution had yet to do so as of June 2013. “Ethiopia Detains Evangelist for ‘Terrorism, Treason,’” International Christian Concern, June 2013.
6. Ethiopian Christian Tamirat Woldegiorgis was arrested in May 2013 by local police who claimed he committed “crimes against Islam,” a crime that does not even exist within the Ethiopian penal system. Woldegiorgis was previously arrested and detained for 22 months under similar accusations. “Two Christians Unlawfully Arrested in Ethiopia for ‘Crimes Against Islam,’” International Christian Concern, June 2013.

7. In March 2011, at least one Christian was killed and approximately 3,000 to 10,000 Christians were displaced when Muslim extremists set fire to 50 churches and many Christian homes in western Ethiopia. “Thousands of Christians Displaced in Ethiopia After Muslim Extremists Torch Churches, Homes,” www.foxnews.com, March 24, 2011.
8. In February 2011, a Muslim mob attacked 17 Christian college students who were distributing Bibles during a mission trip in Ethiopia. “Thousands of Christians Displaced in Ethiopia After Muslim Extremists Torch Churches, Homes,” www.foxnews.com, March 24, 2011.
9. In northern Ethiopia, the Christian Orthodox Church is reportedly highly intolerant of evangelical Christians. Evangelicals are said to be in constant danger and are not protected by local police officials who themselves are members of the Orthodox Church. Many evangelical Christians have been forced to flee the region, particularly after an Orthodox mob attacked and severely beat ten Christians in the area. Musselman, Greg. “Ethiopia: Persecuted Evangelicals, Seeds of Revival,” Christian Broadcasting Network Africa.
10. Also in northern Ethiopia, an Orthodox priest told members of his church to take “intimidating actions against Christians in their community.” This included, according to the priest, refusing to greet evangelical Christians, refusing to rent houses to them or support their businesses, and preventing Orthodox children from forming relationships with evangelical Christian children. Following this declaration, several forms of intimidation against evangelical Christians ensued: members of a local evangelical church were photographed without permission by local officials who also declared the local evangelical church must be shut down, and the evangelical church leader was beaten. “The 5-5-5 Challenge: A Story of Persecution in Ethiopia,” Open Doors blog, April 23, 2013.

Freedom of Expression

11. Ethiopia’s Anti-Terrorism Proclamation states that “whosoever writes, edits, prints, publishes, publicizes, disseminates, shows, makes to be heard any promotional statements encouraging, supporting or advancing terrorist acts stipulated under this Proclamation is punishable with rigorous imprisonment.” According to defense attorney Temam Ababulgu, who represents imprisoned Muslim activists, the proclamation goes against the freedom of expression set out in the Ethiopian Constitution. “Defense Lawyer: Anti-Terrorism law Infringements Freedoms of Speech and Expression (Video),” [Awramba times](http://awramba.com), July 31, 2013.
12. The Proclamation is frequently used to arbitrarily arrest journalists, bloggers and members of political opposition parties. The Charities and Societies Proclamation also imposes significant restrictions on Ethiopian citizens. Internet usage across the country is censored by the government. U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports on Human

Rights Practices for 2012: Ethiopia,” and Kaiser, Katrina, “A Downward Spiral for Freedom of Expression in Ethiopia,” Electronic Frontier Foundation,” June 11, 2012.

13. Reports that police routinely torture and use physical abuse against detainees abound. These reports specifically indicate that political dissidents, students, and those charged with terrorism (presumably under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation) are tortured or abused for information. Though the Ethiopian constitution strictly prohibits the use of torture or physical abuse against detainees, it is evidently ignored. U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012: Ethiopia,”
14. According to the U.S. Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012, the Ethiopian government arrested more than 100 people from March to September of 2012 for acts of treason and terrorism. Those arrested included journalists, activists, bloggers and members of the political opposition. On September 14, 2012, officials arrested Andualem Arage, a political opposition party member, and Eskinder Nega, a prestigious blogger and journalist.
15. In February 2012, Temesgen Dessalgn, editor in chief and owner of a private newspaper, was charged with 130 counts, including inciting public violence and protests. U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012: Ethiopia.”

Recommendations

16. Ethiopia must adhere to its constitutional mandates providing religious freedom and freedom of expression for all people, including those who embrace and adhere to minority religious beliefs and join religious groups still unregistered.
17. Jubilee Campaign encourages the government of Ethiopia to dialogue with the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt, and in particular implement his report to the 22nd Second of the Human Rights Council which report focuses on the need to respect and protect freedom of religion or belief of persons belonging to religious minorities (A/HRC/22/51, 24 Dec. 2012). The Ethiopian government should also be encouraged to implement recommendations found within the report presented to the General Assembly on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance by Prof. Bielefeldt focusing on the right to conversion (A/67/303, 13 August 2012). Principles and recommendations found within Prof. Bielefeldt’s report to the 19th Session of the Human Rights Council addressed registration procedures and called for them to be quick, transparent, fair, inclusive, and non-discriminatory (A/HRC/19/60, 22 December 2011). The standards and internationally recognized principles contained within these three documents need to be implemented by the Ethiopian government to ensure that all religious minorities are treated with dignity and their religious beliefs and practices respected.
18. Jubilee Campaign recommends that Ethiopia, together with the international community, work to promote dialogue between all religious groups within the country, particularly between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Muslim community, and minority

religious groups; and to help resolve ongoing tension between these groups, ongoing persecution of religious groups, and to help prevent future conflict.

19. Jubilee Campaign recommends that proactive steps are taken on a local level to ensure that local and regional governmental officials do not violate the rights of Ethiopian citizens, including arbitrary arrest, detainment, physical abuse, torture and unlawful searches.
20. Ethiopia must adhere to both the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment, to which it acceded in 1994, as well as its own constitutional mandate prohibiting the use of torture against detainees, and implement proactive methods to ensure that local officials abide by these legal requirements.
21. Ethiopia must take steps to ensure that the arbitrary arrest of any person is prevented. This includes ensuring that laws requiring arrest warrants and access to legal counsel are enforced.