

## HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA

### ISSUE

Ethiopia has made significant progress in human rights since the overthrow of the Mengistu regime. Canada supports the Transitional Government's (TGE) efforts at reform and democratization, but recognizes a need for further efforts in national reconciliation and broader political participation.

### BACKGROUND

Ethiopia is now into the fourth year of the transitional process started in 1991 to dismantle the defeated Marxist regime (known as the Dergue) and replace it with a constitutional democracy. The current transitional government is non-elected, and composed mainly of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) — a coalition of ethnically based movements which defeated the government of Mengistu Haile Miriam in a bloody and protracted civil war.

Integrity of the person continues to improve, though reports of arbitrary arrest, detention, and occasional instances of summary execution continue. Charges are now being laid against over 1000 former Mengistu era officials being held in custody. The first tranche of public trials began December 13 in this historic effort to attack the impunity which Ethiopian officials have used in the past to grossly abuse human rights. Opponents of the current government have been involved in confrontations with EPRDF units, particularly in the Ogaden and parts of 'Oromia'. Ethnic and intercommunal violence, a common feature of Ethiopian history, has also flared up in some rural areas.

Freedom of speech, assembly, association, religion and travel were protected in the transitional charter and are guaranteed in the new draft constitution. However, these rights are constrained by a poor security situation in some areas, notably the Ogaden and Eastern Hararghe, incidents of harassment of opposition political parties, and state-monopoly of radio and television. The judiciary has shown some positive signs of independent action. A brash and vigorous independent press, with some irresponsible elements, has emerged.

The TGE is committed to providing basic social services to the entire population without discrimination; however, lack of funds, chronic underdevelopment and food scarcity has hampered these efforts. Military expenditures have been sharply curtailed, but the establishment of a professional army and police force has been slow.

Religious freedom is respected. The new constitution provides for local and regional governments based on language and ethnicity. Education is provided in the local language.

Women are guaranteed full equality; however, customs of some ethnic groups emphasize a subordinate role. Women are prominent, though a minority, in local and national