

Progress to implement some democratic provisions of the Constitution has been slow--the planned international conference to assist in establishing a Human Rights Council and an ombudsman position is now scheduled to take place in 1998. The country continued to suffer a shortage of trained judges, lawyers and law courts. This has had a negative impact on the justice system. Some of those detained for crimes committed under the Derg had been incarcerated without charge for over five years. In 1997 charges were finally laid for the trials of 5,198 people; ninety five per cent of those charged are for genocide while lesser numbers are charged for crimes against humanity or murder. Unfortunately, as not all the charges have been read out in court, they have not all been made public. As well, due to the limitations of the justice system, the actual trials could still take several years to complete.

The Government entered into a dialogue with opposition groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front and a faction of the Ogaden National Liberation Front. Unfortunately, both processes appeared to have broken down by the end of 1997. Key Oromo elders have since been arrested and charged with, among other charges, terrorism and involvement in bombing attacks.

Key institutions of civil society - universities, free press, independent trade unions, NGOs - continue to encounter difficulty in their relations with the Government. NGO's continue to be subject to a rigorous registration procedure. A considerable number of journalists were imprisoned, especially towards the end of the year. The causes varied: some journalists who (it was claimed) were provocative and printed misinformation, were charged with libel, a criminal offence in Ethiopia; others were arrested and charged with working for the media organs of alleged terrorist organizations such as the OLF.

Ethiopia is still adapting to new realities, in particular the enhanced role of the civil society. The Government is adjusting to the need for greater tolerance for pluralism and criticism. Elements of civil society are equally learning to play a more responsible role.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada follows closely developments touching human rights, democratic development and good governance in Ethiopia. Canadian policy is to work with the Government of Ethiopia to establish the systems and institutions required to promote the evolution of democracy, the rule of law, civil society and a market economy in Ethiopia. In this context, Canada provided assistance to the judiciary; developed financial management capacity; contributed to capacity-building of the civil service through training programs for officials and managers; and provided technical advice to develop and strengthen the machinery of government.

Canada also contributed to democratisation by supporting the emergence of civil society. John Bosley, former speaker of Parliament in Canada, has been working under contract with UNDP to help establish procedures for Ethiopia's Parliament.

As appropriate, Canada has raised and continues to raise human rights issues with representatives of the Federal and regional governments. Canada's ambassador chairs the Ambassadorial Donors' sub-group on human rights, democracy and governance. The sub-group exchanges information about the state of human rights and how best to encourage progress on human rights issues and in institution-building.