

ETHIOPIA: Testimonies from Ethiopians

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

NAIROBI, 14 June (IRIN) - Mohamed, 27, former soldier, from Ethiopia

I joined the military when I was 20 and was immediately posted north, first to Humera on the Sudan border. I stayed in the military for seven years, and I was injured in the Ethiopia-Eritrea war, in Badme. A bomb blast injured my face. When the war finished, I wanted to see my family. I was posted to Region 1, Mekele [Tigray], but I pleaded to see my family. I got permission to go to Gode [the capital of Ethiopia's Somali Region].

When I arrived in Jijiga, I discovered that my father and brother had been arrested as ONLF [Ogadeni National Liberation Front] members. Then I got into a very difficult situation. The government told me I had to find my other brother, also an ONLF member. They gave me a gun and said, "Find your brother. Search for him and bring him to us."

Then I was afraid I would be killed, because if I came back to them without my brother, they would think I am ONLF because I am Ogadeni. They will arrest me or kill me. But if I go to my brother, he knows I am military, so he will kill me. I had to leave, but I couldn't get out of the country to Mogadishu. There, in that area, they are opposed to Ethiopians like me and call you 'al Ittihad' [Islamic militant] or 'spy'. You can't go that way - and you can't go to Somaliland, because the Issak [ruling clan] in Hargeysa [capital of Somaliland] have a relationship with Ethiopia. They have cross-border agreements and do security for each other, and they have Ethiopian security officers living in Hargeysa. So I had to come to Bosasso, but I fear this place because there is no government.

I have no plans to go to Saudi Arabia - that's not why I came. I don't want to take that risk. I didn't use the brokers to get here; I came by car. I wanted to find a safe place.

TESTIMONY 2

Fatuma, 21, unemployed, from Ethiopia

I left Dessie [central Ethiopia] to find work. It was a very tough life there. I went from Dessie to Addis Ababa, where I have friends. In

Addis, I used to meet up with my friends and we would plan what to do. We wanted to get out, go to Saudi Arabia and abroad. I was put in touch with a broker through my friends, who were all in a similar situation. The broker was a young man - an Amhara like me - and good company. He told us it was easy to get out and said it could be arranged. I borrowed a lot of money. There are so many brokers in Addis - Amharas, Oromos and Somalis - they can fix the journey. Our broker was in touch with Somalis and Ethiopians who could take us to Region 5 [Ethiopia's Somali Region] and take us across the border.

We arranged to go from Addis Ababa to Harar, and there we connected with another broker. I paid 200 birr (US\$24) and went in a bus with 50 other migrants. In Harar, we were taken by bus to Hartisheik and then handed to another broker. We were kept for five days in the broker's house, and we had to pay another 500 birr (\$60). He waited until there were a lot of us in the house - too many, over 100. I was travelling with women friends, and we all kept together to be safe. When the group was big enough, the broker organised another truck to take us across the border to Burahao [in the self-declared separate state of Somaliland]. There, things went wrong: We were abandoned by the truck in a forested area, and I had to walk for 17 days. I was robbed of all my money and possessions just outside Burahao by a gang of gunmen.

I have been in Bosasso for six months now. I survive by selling tea and working in a small restaurant for 7,000 to 10,000 Somali shillings a day (50 to 70 US cents). I haven't tried to get the boats to Yemen because I am afraid, and I can't afford it. But my friends have gone. I want to go back home, but I am afraid to return because I borrowed a lot of money to pay the brokers. I am in debt. I want to see my daughter so much. She is four years old and I left her with my parents. My parents have no idea I came here, and they don't know if I am alive or dead.

TESTIMONY 3

Hussein, 32, merchant, from Ethiopia

I have been in Bosasso for two months. I am Oromo, a merchant. I left my wife and son in my home area, but my place of work was Addis Ababa. I used to be prominent in the union. When there were elections in the country election, I was working with the opposition. I was an active member of the opposition. Also, I was the chairman of my community - we call it 'kebele' - and I became a target. It became a problem to stay. Also, I was working and travelling with others who were disliked by the government. Some of my friends and fellow workers were arrested and

imprisoned and I became fearful, afraid to stay. I left. I don't know what happened to my friends and colleagues who were put in prison.

TESTIMONY 4

Ali, 27, student, Addis Ababa

I came to Bosasso in November 2005. I was in my third year at university, but education was badly affected in Ethiopia from September 2005.

One day there were disturbances at night in Addis Ababa, and there was fighting between people and soldiers. We held a meeting then. The students were divided between opposition and government supporters. Someone informed on us. Federal police came by bus into the campus and seized about half the students and accused them of being opposition supporters. There was fighting between the students and the federal police, and the students were stoning the police. The police used their guns. They tear-gassed the students and they shot them, right there. They killed 18 on campus - some were my friends. Then they took the bodies away. After the killings, they took a number of students and imprisoned them, accusing them of being opposition supporters.

Everyone fled the university. Many went to Gondar and into Sudan. But I don't know that way - I don't know my way to Sudan. There were three of us who randomly decided that same night that we should flee this way, over the Somali border. We took a truck from Harar and went to Hartishiek, where we waited one week in the house of a middleman. Then we came here. I have talked to my father on the phone, who he told me, "Get out of Ethiopia. Don't stay - you'll be imprisoned or killed."

I have no plan. I want to continue my education, but I fear going back to Ethiopia.

[ENDS]