

YEMEN: Ethiopian exodus

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

NAIROBI, 14 June (IRIN) - An increasing number of migrants arriving in Yemen are Ethiopians. By April 2006, the number of Ethiopians registering as refugees began to overtake the number of Somalis. The Ethiopian government said most are economic migrants seeking jobs in rich nations on the Arabian peninsula, which act as "magnets for people from neighbouring countries."

"Legally," said Bereket Simon, advisor to Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, "they can travel on their own to Yemen, Somalia, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia and anywhere, and we would have no interest in controlling that. The illegal movement may also have to do with the pastoralist culture, which makes people move in search of livelihoods."

Bereket dismissed allegations that people were leaving Ethiopia for political reasons. "Those claiming that they are fleeing political persecution are wrong," he said. Ethiopia has a constitution that guarantees freedom of speech and movement. Nobody is being persecuted for having different political views. But we have a legitimate right to defend ourselves against terrorist groups like the ONLF [Ogaden National Liberation Front rebel movement], which has declared war on the state."

[ENDS]