

26 April 2006

Ethiopia: government recognition of conflict IDPs crucial to addressing their plight

Internal displacement due to conflict occurs in different parts of Ethiopia. It is caused mainly by ethnic tensions exacerbated by the government's regionalisation policy along ethnic lines, tight political control from the centre, and widespread resource shortages in a chronically food-insecure country. In the absence of a coherent approach to internally displaced persons (IDPs), estimates of displacement vary from 100,000 to 280,000, including some 60,000 drought IDPs. This report considers the displacement situations in the four regions of Tigray, Somali, Oromiya and Gambella. Drought displacement and the national resettlement scheme are mentioned as well.

There is no official line on who is an IDP and official recognition of IDPs is politically sensitive. While the displaced in some regions, such as Tigray and parts of Gambella, are said to be integrated in the government's food-for-work programme or receive food aid, many displaced are currently not recognised as such, which puts them in danger of being excluded from national food distribution schemes and the required protection. The current drought affecting the south and east of Ethiopia is again diverting attention from the plight of IDPs. Political volatility as occurred after the May 2005 parliamentary elections and tensions along the Ethiopian-Eritrean border could easily cause additional displacement.

The UN hopes to engage the Ethiopian government in a national IDP assessment exercise in 2006. This would be an important first step towards recognising the problem and scope of internal displacement in Ethiopia and identifying IDP-specific protection needs in a situation of great overall humanitarian need. It is hoped that the assessment will lead to improvements in the provision of national and international assistance, which is currently ad hoc and treats IDPs as merely part of vulnerable groups. However, effective protection, as well as sustainable and safe reintegration of IDPs, will depend on the progress made in addressing the causes of conflicts in Gambella and Somali/Oromiya regions, the physical demarcation of the Ethiopian-Eritrean border, the protection of minority interests and the availability of basic public services.

Background and main causes of displacement

Ethiopia has a long history of centralised state power, culminating in almost 20 years of military rule under the Dergue. After toppling the Dergue regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) quickly turned itself into the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and monopolised power, marginalising other regional groups or pushing them into opposition.

In an attempt to decentralise the rigid system it had inherited, the EPRDF engaged in a major reform process. Nine regions were created, to a large extent following ethnic lines. Within the regions, power was vested in *wereda* (district councils) and *kebele* (local councils). These, however, are governed by political parties either directly affiliated, or allied, to the EPRDF. Thus in practice democratisation and decentralisation remain superficial, despite official declarations to the contrary. Central government holds a firm grip on regional, district, and local entities, without shying away from using force against political opponents (UNHCR, January 2004; HRW, May 2005). Existing tensions among Ethiopia's 80 ethnic groups are in effect exacerbated by the government's regionalisation policy which effectively increases people's awareness of ethnic differences, while at the same time not ensuring the protection of ethnic minorities' interests.

The May 2005 parliamentary elections led to the violent suppression in June and November 2005 of widespread protests against vote-rigging by the EPRDF, and

allegedly to the displacement of thousands of people (HRW, 13 January 2006; ENC, 24 July 2005). In reaction to the repression, several donors have diverted their support for Ethiopia away from the government, instead funding NGOs directly; they have warned the government that non-partisan aid distribution has become difficult in an increasingly politicised environment (IRIN, 14 November 2005).

Tigray: war displacement

Despite a history of common struggle to overthrow the 1974-1991 Dergue dictatorship, tensions between the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea – which had gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993 after having been part of the latter since 1962 – rose quickly during the 1990s, escalating into an all-out war between May 1998 and June 2000. The cause was a dispute over small sections of their common border. About 100,000 people were killed in the conflict and over 360,000 internally displaced, of whom 90 per cent in the Tigray Region and about 30,000 in Afar (GoE, 17 November 2000). Ethiopia deported tens of thousands of persons identified as Eritreans, while Eritrea did the same with persons identified as Ethiopians living on its territory.

Most IDPs – but not these Eritrean deportees – returned home after a June 2000 ceasefire, followed by the December 2000 Algiers Peace Agreement. Today, an estimated 62,000 people remain displaced in the Tigray region, living mostly in host communities, with minimal external support.

The rejection by Ethiopia of a supposedly legally binding Boundary Commission border demarcation ruling, issued in

April 2002, caused renewed tensions between the two states, leading up to a stand-off at the end of 2005 along the border, and raising fears of renewed internal displacement in both countries. The monitoring activities of the 3,000-strong United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) in the demilitarised 25-km-wide Temporary Security Zone along the border were seriously hampered (UNNS, 11 November 2005). The Boundary Commission agreed in early 2006 to negotiate with Ethiopia and Eritrea the resumption of its demarcation activity, interrupted in 2003 (UN SC, 3 January and 6 March 2006). In the hope that such diplomatic activity would lead to more stability, the UN Security Council extended UNMEE's mandate, due to expire by 15 April 2006, for one month (UN SC, 13 April 2006).

Gambella

In the remote south-western Gambella region, multiple ethnic conflicts between two main groups, the Anuak and the Nuer, displaced tens of thousand of people (OCHA Ethiopia, May 2004). A parallel conflict involved the Anuak and "Highlanders" (mostly resettled forcefully in the 1980s under the Dergue regime). Along with immigrating Nuer from Sudan, they reduced the Anuak to a minority group (HRW, 24 March 2005).

The long-standing conflict escalated in late 2003 and increasingly involved the Ethiopian army. At least 15,000 people, mostly Anuak, were forced to flee their homes in December 2003 (HRW, 24 March 2005; IRIN, 12 February 2004). Since then, and particularly after counter-attacks by Anuak on Highlanders, the army is reported to have committed widespread human rights violations

against the Anuak throughout the region, in a climate of almost total impunity and adding to the general insecurity (UN CTE, 20 April 2005; HRW, 24 March 2005; Amnesty International, 17 December 2004). The central government assumed de facto regional control after a change in the regional government.

Incursions of Anuak and Nuer rebel groups from neighbouring Sudan have also caused displacement along the border. Occasional incidents of violence are still occurring in the region, displacing over 3,000 people in Nuer zone in early 2006 (UNCT, February 2006). With the continuously fragile security situation and inaccessibility of parts of Gambella to humanitarian actors, consistent displacement monitoring is virtually impossible and the UN maintains a working figure of 50,000 IDPs, pending assessment (OCHA, email correspondence, 7 February 2006; UN CTE, 20 April 2005).

Borena (Oromiya region)

The central government's suppression of political dissent is particularly harsh in Oromiya region but is often difficult to monitor, especially in rural areas. Because of the government's history of repression, reports from political opponents and human rights organisations that thousands of people, particularly in Borena, had to leave their homes in the wake of widespread repression after the May 2005 parliamentary elections seem plausible (HRW, 13 January 2006; ENC, July 2005).

Ethnic conflict between the Gabra and the Guji, and between the Gabra and the Borena displaced over 40,000 people in 2005. Many remain displaced, and local authorities do not consider them eligible

for emergency food distribution and other basic services and protection. This makes their situation very precarious, particularly in the context of the current drought (Daily Monitor, 19 July 2005; UN OCHA, 3 January 2006).

Tensions along regional border between Somali and Oromiya

In December 2003 in Somali region, fighting between Oromos and Somalis – claiming land ownership and rights – led to the displacement of 19,000 people (almost 3,000 families), whereas 70,000 others were displaced by drought (OCHA Ethiopia, May 2004).

A border referendum carried out in October 2004 along parts of the regional border between Oromiya and Somali to determine the preference for administrative status of border *kebeles* created animosities between the two ethnic groups and forced tens of thousands of people belonging to minorities to leave their homes.

OCHA estimates that up to 80,000 people were displaced by the regional border conflict. It is not clear how many have returned during 2005. While the Ethiopian government claims that all displaced have returned, there may be as many as 50,000 remaining, of which around 15,000 are in need of emergency food assistance in camps in Afder zone. In July 2005, new conflicts between the Oromos and Somalis in Mieso areas of West Hararghe were reported, causing displacement in addition to the estimated 2,500 IDPs living in Mieso since December 2004. If their displacement goes unrecognised, they risk being excluded from the food allocation scheme. Assistance to those groups from NGOs was

expected to stop by the end of 2005 (UNCT, July 2005).

Drought: scarce resources as cause of ethnic tensions

Somali and South Oromiya regions, and increasingly Afar region, are chronically food-insecure and are currently affected by one of the most severe droughts in years. In the whole country, consecutive years of drought, floods and scarcity of water and pastureland are testing the culture of sharing scarce resources to its limits, increasingly triggering conflicts (IRIN, 12 January 2005; Oxfam, February 2005). Somali region faces the additional challenge of hosting and reintegrating 75,000 IDPs displaced by drought since 2000 (OCHA email, February 2006). New drought-displacement is likely to occur. Since severe flooding in the Somali region in 2004, many displaced have received practically no assistance due to the irregular and erratic general ration distribution and lack of other coping mechanisms in the region's camps and districts.

Within the framework of the UNDP-sponsored Regional Recovery Programme and in collaboration with the Somali regional government, the UN Country Team assessed in 2005 the possibilities for the return and reintegration of some 5,600 drought-IDPs from Hartisheik and Fafen camps to their place of origin in Deghabur zone. That goal had been reached by February 2006 (UNCT, February 2006).

Controversial Resettlement Scheme

In early 2003, as part of its Food Security Programme, the Ethiopian government launched a new Resettlement Programme, intending to resettle, within

three years, 2.2 million people from the chronically food-insecure highlands to more fertile agricultural areas. The government suggests that the scheme is successful and mostly leads to self-sufficiency (FAO/WHO, 26 February 2006). But according to other reports, resettlement was often experienced as a heavy burden, not respecting the four core principles of voluntariness, allocation of under-utilised land, host community consultation and proper preparation, and in certain cases leading to critical malnutrition. A considerable number of resettled people eventually are forced to move on (OCHA, 15 August 2005; Forum for Social Studies, 2005; Ethiopian Reporter, 24 December 2005, UNCT, February 2006; Herald, 19 March 2006). Past experiences of resettlement programmes, particularly large-scale resettlement under the Dergue regime in the 1980s, were fraught with problems and caused widespread suffering.

Population figures: who is an IDP?

According to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), the total number of IDPs (due to

drought and conflict) is between 100,000 and 280,000 out of a population of 73 million. The vagueness of the estimate stems in large part from the lack of possibilities for monitoring return movements, and from the fact that local authorities may be inflating the numbers of IDPs reported.

There is general disagreement between the Ethiopian government and the international community, and occasionally also among national agencies, on whom to consider an IDP and at what point in time someone ceases to be an IDP. Displacement for more than five years, and receiving emergency food assistance seem indicators to the government that a person is either integrated or that his or her needs are taken care of. According to the government disasters agency, there are currently no conflict-induced displacement situations in Ethiopia (OCHA, telephone interview, February 2006). In particular, new displacement is not being recognised by the government. Its early-warning system meant to respond to drought-induced displacement does not cover conflict-induced displacement (Interview with ICRC, April 2006; OCHA, 1 July 2004, p.13).

OCHA Ethiopia's February 2006 estimates of internally displaced people

Somali/Oromiya	border conflict:	50,000
Gambella	conflict:	50,000
Tigray	following Ethiopian-Eritrean border war:	62,000
Somali	drought 80%, conflict 20%:	75,000 (15,000 conflict)*
Borena (Oromiya)	conflict between Gabra and Guji:	43,000**
Afar	conflict displacement of Bure:	1,000**

* According to regional authorities

** According to local authorities

Acute humanitarian situation, lacking focus on IDP protection

Ethiopia is an extremely food-insecure country with up to six million people considered chronically food-insecure and another 10 million facing transitory food insecurity (FAO/WFP, 24 February 2006). While sufficient rain in 2005 assured a relatively good harvest in the west and north, the regions of Somali, Oromiya (Borena, Bale and Hararghe), and potentially Afar and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region are seriously affected by the drought extending across the Horn of Africa. In a context where two-thirds of the population already lives in absolute poverty, the drought has devastating long-term effects on livelihoods. Malnutrition rates are high in many parts of the country, reaching alarming dimensions in Somali region, particularly in Liben (UNSSCN, February 2006; IRIN, 23 March 2006).

With much of the current national and international efforts directed at alleviating immediate drought-related needs, IDP-specific protection needs are easily overlooked, particularly in the context of resource allocation through *kebele* officials, and in the context of inclusion in food allocation schemes.

Kebele officials generally have great power and influence over the population and over the distribution of goods and services. Good relations with the local officials are crucial for obtaining land, farming aid, access to health care and education, and identity cards. Internally displaced persons often do not have the right connections. Ensuing possible discrimination comes in addition to the lack

of traditional coping mechanisms such as family ties.

As is the case in several displacement situations in Ethiopia, IDPs will suffer from direct lack of food and water if they are not recognised by the government and included in emergency food service schemes. This has been a reported problem in Borena and in the Somali/Oromiya post-referendum displacement situation (Afder, Liben and Shinile zones). Many post-referendum IDPs have not received any assistance and their livelihood conditions and nutritional situation are deteriorating (WFP, 1 April 2005, p.5; OCHA, 11 April 2005; Relief Bulletin, 3 January 2005). While the government disasters agency does provide food assistance to some IDPs upon written request by regional authorities, the approach remains largely ad hoc (UN OCHA 2005 national assessment note). In addition, the government decided to consider IDPs locally integrated after five years and has taken many Somali IDPs with little option to return home off the assistance beneficiary lists (OCHA, 18 April 2005; 3 May 2005).

In Tigray, the government claims to have included everyone in the Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP), a food-for-work programme started by the Ethiopian government in February 2005 and extended to Tigray in 2006, but the inclusion of IDPs in the PSNP could so far not be verified on the ground. The government also says it provides food to Gambella's IDPs (OCHA, telephone interview, February 2006, UNCT, February 2006).

In Gambella region, many displaced have moved to abandoned refugee camps

along the Sudanese border, where they receive no assistance at all and are in urgent need of shelter and health services (UN CTE, 20 April 2005, OCHA, telephone interview, February 2006).

Obstacles to return

In the **Tigray** region, landmines and insecurity are the main protection concerns still preventing many of the remaining IDPs from returning home and becoming self-sufficient. In Ethiopia as a whole there are still some two million mines; they killed almost 600 people and wounded over 700 between 2001 and 2004, most of them in Tigray and Afar regions (IRIN, 6 April 2006). The field teams of the Mine Action Coordination Centre of the UNMEE are carrying out mine risk education and assistance for people living in areas suspected to be dangerous (SG Report, 6 March 2006).

In regions like Gambella, Somali and Oromiya, general insecurity and the lack of prospects for re-building livelihoods are believed to be the main reasons for people not returning. Figures relating to return are not available.

National and international response

At the national level, the Federal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) is the main government institution responsible for the emergency needs of conflict and war IDPs, in collaboration with relevant ministries such as Health, Agriculture and Water Resources. In the absence of a coherent national IDP policy, the government's response to IDPs'

needs is *ad hoc* and inconsistent, unless it seems politically expedient to acknowledge them officially, as was the case in Tigray.

Where there are response plans for IDPs, the DPPA works in close cooperation with regional governments, local NGOs and IDP committees, UN agencies such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP), and international NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, to provide protection and assistance to IDPs in Ethiopia (OCHA, 24 May 2004, p.5). The DPPA, in collaboration with the WFP and with the Relief Society of Tigray as its main implementing partner, has been assisting people internally displaced by the Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict in the Tigray region since 1999. In Gambella, food has been delivered to the 3,000 newly-displaced (UNCT, February 2006). Despite such activities, many new displacement situations, particularly in Oromiya and Somali regions, are not consistently being recognised nor addressed.

In 2003, Ethiopia signed the *Khartoum Declaration on Internal Displacement in the IGAD Sub-Region*, thereby recognising that it is affected by the problems of internal displacement and that it has primary responsibility for protecting and assisting IDPs, and committing itself to developing and adopting a national IDP policy. As an important step towards national awareness-raising on the issue of internal displacement, OCHA and the Ethiopian government agreed in 2005 to carry out a national IDP assessment (OCHA, 2005 national assessment note).

This assessment would not only help the Ethiopian government focus on developing an IDP policy, it would also enable the international response, which currently focuses mainly on emergency food distribution, to address IDP-specific protection needs.

The 2006 Joint Humanitarian Appeal is presented jointly by the Ethiopian government and humanitarian agencies and led by the DPPA. While it mentions IDPs as one of the most vulnerable groups, the programmes do not specifically target conflict-IDPs. The Joint Humanitarian Appeal is meant to complement the Productive Safety Net Programme.

Effective protection, as well as sustainable and safe reintegration of IDPs, will depend on the progress made in addressing the root causes of conflicts in Gambella and Somali/Oromiya regions, the physical demarcation of the boundary, the protection of minority interests and the availability of basic public services. Official recognition of IDPs and their particular protection needs is a crucial first step in that direction.

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).

Sources:

Amnesty International (AI), 17 December 2004, Ethiopia: Torture/Detention without trial/Possible prisoner of conscience

Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement, September 2003, Conference on Internal Displacement in the IGAD Sub-Region, Report of the Experts Meeting

Daily Monitor, 19 July 2005, Gabra, Guji Conflict Displaces Over 43,000

Ethiopian Herald, 19 March 2006, State begins resettling 10,000 peasant households

Ethiopian National Congress, 24 July 2005, Repression in rural Ethiopia

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), 24 February 2006, FAO crop and food assessment mission to Ethiopia

Forum for Social Studies, 2005, Understanding the dynamics of resettlement in Ethiopia

Human Rights Watch (HRW), 13 January 2006, Hidden crackdown in rural areas

Human Rights Watch (HRW), 10 May 2005, Suppressing Dissent. Human rights abuses and political repression in Ethiopia's Oromiya region

Human Rights Watch (HRW), 24 March 2005, Targeting the Anuak: Human Rights Violations and Crimes against Humanity in Ethiopia's Gambella Region

Writenet, 2004, Ethiopia: a situation analysis and trend assessment

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 15 January 2004, Ethiopia: Gov't involved in Gambella attack, says rights group

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 12 January 2004, Ethiopia-Sudan: Thousands of Anyuak flee to Sudan

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 8 January 2004, Ethiopia: Focus on Gambella violence

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 18 March 2005, ETHIOPIA: Soldiers to be tried over Gambella killings

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 14 November 2005, Ethiopia: Donors concerned over political unrest

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), December 2003, High mortality and malnutrition rates among settlers in northwestern Ethiopia alarms MSF

Oxfam International, 28 February 2005, Livelihoods/Emergency Assessment in Afar Region

The Reporter, 24 December 2005, The case of resettlement program worth 1.9 billion

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), June 2004, UNICEF Humanitarian Action: Ethiopia donor update 1 Jun 2004

United Nations Security Council (UN SC), 6 March 2006, Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopian and Eritrea

United Nations Security Council (UN SC), 3 January 2006, Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea

United Nations News Service, 29 November 2005, Increasing restrictions on Eritrean-Ethiopian border hampering UN peace mission

United Nations Security Council (UN SC), 13 April 2006, Security Council extends UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea until 15 May, unanimously adopting resolution 1670 (2006)

UN Country Team Ethiopia (UN CTE), February 2006, Focus on Ethiopia, February 2006

UN Country Team Ethiopia (UN CTE), 20 April 2005, Focus on Ethiopia: Regional Overview

United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UN SSCN), February 2006, Nutrition Information in Crisis Situations Report No 8-Summary

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 3 January 2006, Humanitarian Bulletin

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 15 August 2005, Ethiopia-OCHA: 15-Aug-05

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 11 April 2005, Relief Bulletin: Weekly Humanitarian Highlights in Ethiopia 11 Apr 2005

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 4 February 2005, UN OCHA - Ethiopia: Humanitarian News 4 Feb 2005

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 31 December 2004, Affected Population in the Horn of Africa Region

UN Country Team Ethiopia (UN CTE), July 2005, Focus on Ethiopia, July 2005

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UN OCHA-EUE), 24 May 2004, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 2005, Proposed Comprehensive National Assessment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UN OCHA-EUE), 28 January 2005, Weekly Humanitarian Highlights in Ethiopia, 28 January 2005

UN Secretary-General, 7 March 2005, Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea

World Food Programme (WFP), April 2005, World Food Programme Emergency Report 2005, Report No. 14 / 2005 - Date 01 April 2005

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 5 April 2006, Ethiopia: EC funds mine clearance

Note: All documents used in this overview are directly accessible on the Ethiopia [List of Sources](#) page of our website.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org

Media contact:

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer

Head of Monitoring and Advocacy Department

Tel.: +41 (0)22 799 07 03

Email: jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch

IDMC

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701