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# ETHIOPIA

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## Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

**Population:** 77.4 million (39.8 million under 18)

**Government armed forces:** 152,500

**Compulsory recruitment age:** 18 (see text)

**Voluntary recruitment age:** 18

**Voting age:** 18

**Optional Protocol:** not signed

**Other treaties ratified (see glossary):**

CRC, GC AP I and II, ILO 138, ILO 182, ACRWC

*There were no reports of child recruitment or use by government forces or armed opposition groups, although independent monitoring was severely limited.*

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## Context

The 2000 Algiers Agreement,<sup>1</sup> ending war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, established a 25-km-wide demilitarized zone, known as the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), and created the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission.<sup>2</sup> Ethiopia deployed an additional seven military divisions to the border in December 2004 and tensions between the two countries steadily escalated.<sup>3</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1640 (2005) demanded that Ethiopia “accept fully and without further delay the final and binding decision of the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission”.<sup>4</sup>

The Boundary Commission suspended its operations in March 2005, citing Ethiopian non-co-operation over demarcation,<sup>5</sup> and indicated that it would close in November 2007 unless it was allowed to proceed to demarcation.<sup>6</sup> The peacekeeping capacity of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) was severely limited by Eritrean restrictions on its movements and its force was reduced to 1,700 peacekeepers in April 2007.<sup>7</sup> By October 2007 Ethiopia maintained an estimated 100,000 troops along the border. Eritrea maintained 4,000 troops in the TSZ and an estimated 120,000 troops in the border area.<sup>8</sup> An increase in the number of cross-border abductions and missing persons, including children, was reported. This was attributed in part to the Eritrean government’s conscription campaign.<sup>9</sup>

The government continued to face internal opposition from armed groups, including the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which sought self-determination for ethnic Somalis in the Ogaden region, and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).<sup>10</sup> In April 2007 ONLF gunmen killed 74 people and kidnapped seven others at an oilfield in Abole, a remote region of Ethiopia populated by ethnic Somalis.<sup>11</sup> In June 2007 the government launched a major military campaign

in the Ogaden against the ONLF, committing widespread human rights violations, blocking food deliveries and forcibly relocating thousands of people.<sup>12</sup> By October 2007 the government was reportedly forcing civilians in the region to form militias to fight the ONLF, and those who refused faced possible detention and torture.<sup>13</sup> During 2006 the authorities in Oromia state reportedly imprisoned, tortured and harassed their critics, including schoolchildren.<sup>14</sup>

The ONLF and the OLF reportedly received military support from Eritrea and Somalia. Ethiopia provided Eritrean armed groups with training and arms and the Shiraro and Shimbela refugee camps in Ethiopia were used as recruiting grounds by these groups.<sup>15</sup>

In October 2006 Prime Minister Zenawi declared Ethiopia officially at war with Somalia after the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) declared a jihad (holy war) against the Ethiopian government over its military involvement in Somali affairs.<sup>16</sup> In late 2006, Ethiopian troops entered Somalia to support Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) against the UIC and forced the UIC from Mogadishu and other areas, remaining in Somalia as of late 2007.<sup>17</sup> Ethiopian forces fired into urban civilian areas and summarily executed civilians, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, including children.<sup>18</sup>

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## Government

### National recruitment legislation and practice

Ethiopia set 18 as the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces. However, because of the lack of adequate birth registration in Ethiopia the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern over possible flaws in the recruitment process.<sup>19</sup> According to the government, recruits and conscripts were required to produce documents such as school or medical records testifying to their age. Military authorities reportedly refused to permit children under 18 to enlist.<sup>20</sup>

Military service was not compulsory. However, Defence Force Proclamation No. 27/1996 stated that the Defence Ministry “may, in accordance with criteria issued by it from time to time, recruit persons fit and willing for military purposes” (Article 4). In call-up notices, these criteria defined a minimum recruitment age of 18.<sup>21</sup> Failure to respond to call-up was punishable by “simple” imprisonment and, in times of emergency, general mobilization or war, by up to 10 years’ “rigorous” imprisonment.<sup>22</sup>

There was no available evidence regarding child soldiers in Ethiopia, and reports of children being unofficially involved in either government or armed group activity were difficult to verify.<sup>23</sup> There were no reports of child soldiers being

used by Ethiopian forces in the conflict in Somalia.<sup>24</sup>

The constitution stated that children would “not be subject to exploitative practices, neither to be required nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous or harmful to [their] health or well-being” (Article 36).

## Armed groups

### Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

In September 2007 the ONLF told the Child Soldiers Coalition that “The minimum age for recruitment into the ONLF military wing is 18 years and there are no ONLF fighters under the age of 18.” The ONLF said that it “fully recognizes and has adopted all articles enshrined in the Convention on The Rights of The Child and in particular the Optional Protocol to the convention”.<sup>25</sup> There was no available information from independent sources about the use by the ONLF of child soldiers.

### Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)

The Ethiopia Emergency Demobilization and Reintegration Project (EDRP), funded by a World Bank loan, ended on 30 June 2007. None of the soldiers supported under this program were under the age of 18 at the time of their demobilization.<sup>26</sup> There were reportedly no programs in 2007 that specialized in supporting the demobilization of children.<sup>27</sup>

## Developments

In November 2006 the Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Ethiopia to take all possible measures to prevent the recruitment of children and to ratify the Optional Protocol. The Committee also recommended that Ethiopia provide physical and psychological recovery measures for all children affected by armed conflict.<sup>28</sup>

UN Security Council Resolution 1767 provided for the extension of the peacekeeping mandate of UNMEE until January 2008.<sup>29</sup>

Ethiopia hosted around 100,000 refugees from Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Eritrea, with 300 people crossing to Ethiopia each month to seek asylum, almost half of whom were children.<sup>30</sup>

1 United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), Algiers Peace Agreement, 2000, [www.unmeeonline.org](http://www.unmeeonline.org).

2 International Crisis Group (ICG), “Ethiopia and Eritrea: preventing war”, Africa Report No. 101, 22 December 2005.

- 3 Ibid.; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea, UN Doc. S/2005/142, 7 March 2005; UN Security Council Resolution 1622, UN Doc. S/RES/1622 (2005), 13 September 2005.
- 4 UN Security Council Resolution 1640 on the Situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia, UN Doc. S/RES/1640 (2005), 23 November 2005.
- 5 UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea, UN Doc. S/2005/400, 20 June 2005.
- 6 ICG, “Ethiopia and Eritrea: stopping the slide to war”, Africa Briefing No. 48, 5 November 2007.
- 7 UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea, UN Doc. S/2007/440, 18 July 2007.
- 8 “Stopping the slide to war”, above note 6.
- 9 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 7; UN Security Council Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea, UN Doc. S/2006/749, 19 September 2006; Report of the Secretary-General, above note 3.
- 10 “Stopping the slide to war”, above note 6.
- 11 “Scores die in Ethiopia oil attack”, BBC News, 24 April 2007.
- 12 Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Ethiopia: crackdown in the east punishes civilians”, press release, 4 July 2007.
- 13 “Ethiopians said to push civilians into rebel war”, *New York Times*, 15 December 2007.
- 14 “Ethiopia”, *Human Rights Watch World Report 2007*.
- 15 “Stopping the slide to war”, above note 6.
- 16 “Ethiopia says technically at war with Somali Islamists”, Reuters Alertnet, 24 October 2006, [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org).
- 17 ICG, “Somalia: the tough part is ahead”, Africa Briefing No. 45, 26 January 2007; “Ethiopia bogged down in Somalia”, BBC News, 27 November 2007.
- 18 HRW, “Shell-shocked: civilians under siege in Mogadishu”, *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 19, No. 12(A), August 2007.
- 19 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of report submitted by Ethiopia, Concluding observations, UN Doc. CRC/C/ETH/CO/3, 1 November 2006.
- 20 Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of report submitted by Ethiopia, Summary record, UN Doc. CRC/C/SR.1164, 22 September 2006.
- 21 Information from Rädä Barnen (Save the Children – Sweden), March 2004. As cited in Child Soldiers Coalition, *Global Report 2004*.
- 22 Amnesty International Netherlands Section 1998, “Ethiopia: dienstwigeren en desertie”, citing War Resisters’ International, Ethiopia: CONCODOC 1998 report, 17 August 1998, <http://wri-irg.org>. As cited in Coalition *Global Report 2004*.
- 23 Confidential source, Addis Ababa, September 2007.

- 24 Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Somalia, UN Doc. S/2007/259, 7 May 2007.
- 25 E-mail from ONLF to Child Soldiers Coalition, 7 September 2007.
- 26 Confidential source, Addis Ababa, September 2007; World Bank, “Ethiopia – Demobilization and Reintegration Project”, Environmental Assessment, 31 May 2004, [www.web.worldbank.org/](http://www.web.worldbank.org/), as cited in Coalition Global Report 2004.
- 27 Confidential source, Addis Ababa, September 2007.
- 28 Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of report submitted by Ethiopia, Concluding observations, UN Doc. CRC/C/ETH/CO/3, 1 November 2006.
- 29 UN Security Council Resolution on the Situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia, UN Doc. S/RES/1767 (2007), 30 July 2007.
- 30 UNHCR, Global Appeal 2007, Ethiopia, [www.unhcr.org/](http://www.unhcr.org/); Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Ethiopia, UN Doc. CERD/C/ETH/CO/15, 20 June 2007.