

Statement by Chief Commissioner of the Ethiopian

Human Rights Commission

Almost twelve years have elapsed since the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission was established to promote and protect the human and civil rights of all Ethiopians. Since its founding, as its constitutional and statutory mandates requires of it, the Commission has sought the improvement of all human rights, irrespective of their category, collective or individual nature. In the last twelve years, the Commission has strived to identify, address, and seek redress for violations of all rights and privileges guaranteed to all Ethiopians in their Constitution. While the Commission is headquartered in Addis Ababa, it works throughout the country; eight centers in the Regional States diligently coordinate their efforts to realize the Commission's numerous goals and objectives.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, as its establishment law ensures, is an independent human rights institution recognized by the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It has been discharging its statutory responsibilities through its constituting Proclamation, No. 210/2000. One of its important mandates is to create awareness in the public regarding human rights instruments provided for under the Constitution as well as in international instruments ratified by Ethiopia and ensuring their implementation in the country.

The Commission's mandate also includes to undertake investigations into allegations of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to the extent such violations are found, to ensure that they are properly and sufficiently addressed without impunity. It is with this fundamental conviction that the Commission, notwithstanding time constraints and potential risk to its staff, conducted several independent investigations into the disturbances in some parts of the country in the last couple of years.

The Commission's investigations made significant findings of fact, including violations of human rights, and based on those findings, made recommendations to the House of Peoples' Representatives. Some of those recommendations have included calls for accountability of officials who violated their oath to the public. The Commission's bold and independent findings has been hailed by many groups, both domestic and international, as important in the development of human rights in the country, and the

Commission as an exemplary human rights institution and watchdog. In this vein, the Commission has also actively participated in international human rights meetings and training sessions for its staff.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission in the last several years has also focused on monitoring and evaluating prison conditions throughout the country, reviewed allegations of police misconduct, and also given due attention to the human rights issues faced by vulnerable members of society, including women, children, the elderly, and the disabled. It has given advice to government agencies and provided legal aid services to those who could not afford to advocate for themselves. As stated above, the Commission's investigations emphasized the importance of accountability and good governance, and in some cases, has compelled changes in both public policy and the conduct of those in positions of power. We are of the belief that the realization of human rights in our nation requires persistence and unrelenting advocacy on behalf of the people.

While these successes are significant, the Commission believes there are some areas of human rights that require improvement. The relentless advocacy on behalf of our citizens cannot be fully achieved with our current capacity limitations such as the paucity of skilled manpower and resources among others.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission envisions having constructive engagement with policy makers, civil society organizations, international partners, and other stakeholders in various endeavours that promote human rights. For example, over the years, the Commission has had active and fruitful collaboration with the Center for Human Rights (CHR). The Ethiopian Journal of Human Rights, published by the CHR, is an example of our numerous areas of collaboration with universities. We wish to expand our collaboration with the CHR and Addis Ababa University, given our fundamental conviction that universities play crucial roles in the enhancement of human rights through teaching, research, advocacy and community services.

Ethiopia is currently in the midst of growth and reform in almost every aspect of the economy and democratic system. It is impossible to deny the tremendous challenges of good governance and accountability which

contributed to some of the disturbances I mentioned above, however, the Commission believes that such challenging moments present enormous opportunities for growth and improvement, especially in the human rights realm. Our nation of more than 100 million, the second largest in the continent, is also territorially large. The challenges it faces, especially in the area of human and civil rights, are consequently multi-dimensional. We believe, however, that such wealth in terms of human resources also allows us to seek and find solutions from diverse sources. This endeavor requires the participation of a broad and cross-section of our society to be able to successfully advance the country's human rights agenda. The Commission therefore calls upon all governmental and other stakeholders as well as students of higher learning to join us to identify, address and resolve the various human rights challenges our country faces.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission strongly believes that the Ethiopian Journal of Human Rights contributes immensely to initiating scholarly debate on human rights related themes and adds ultimately to the promotion of human rights and values. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to restate the Commission's continued interest in further strengthening its relationship with the CHR and contributing towards the realization of the objectives of the journal.

Dr. Addisu Gebreigzabhier,
Chief Commissioner, the Ethiopian Human Rights
Commission,

Editor's Note

The Ethiopian Journal of Human Rights (EJHR) is a multidisciplinary journal published by the Center for Human Rights, Addis Ababa University (CHR-AAU). This third volume of the EJHR features a special issue entitled "*Women, Law and the Administration of Justice*" dedicated to findings of research project carried out by the CHR-AAU in collaboration with partners.

The five thematic areas identified within the framework of the research project are: (1) Women's Property Claims in Customary Justice Systems, (2) The Working Condition of Female Factory Workers, (3) Experiences of Female Victims of Intimate Partner Violence: Legal and Social Protections, (4) Law, the Administration of Justice and Women with Disabilities, and (5) Implications of Multiple Spousal Relationships: Experiences of Women. Accordingly, the five articles included in this special issue fall within these five general thematic areas.

This EJHR's Special Issue covers contributions based on rigorous empirical research carried out within the framework of the Access to Justice Project; which by itself is part of the CHR's wider commitment to further Women's Right Agenda through broadening of the evidence base to combat violation of rights as well as through sustained and focused advocacy practices.

The Access to Justice Project of the AAU-CHR was a scaling up of a pilot project called "Legal Literacy, Rights Advice and information for the Poor People": (2008-2012) initiated through partnership forged between Active Learning Center (the University of Glasgow, United Kingdom) and Organization for Social Justice in Ethiopia. The Access to Justice Project was implemented in partnership with the Law Schools of Adama, Ambo and Hawassa Universities, with financial assistance by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The overall objective of the Project is to make a long-term difference to the lives of poor people by raising awareness of their legal rights and by providing them the means by which they can secure redress to rights and social justice. The targeted beneficiaries of the Project are poor and disadvantaged section of the society living in Addis Ababa, Adama, Hawassa, Ambo and surrounding areas of these urban centers.

I would like to thank members of the editorial committee, the external reviewers and the authors for their valuable contributions in ensuring the continuity of the EJHR. Furthermore, we would like to thank the Ethiopian Human Rights commission for sponsoring the publication of this and preceding volumes of EJHR and for the fruitful collaboration with the Center of Human Rights.

Meron Zeleke(PhD)

Editor in Chief of the Ethiopian Journal of Human Rights