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Human Rights Violations in Federal Ethiopia: When Ethnic Identity is a Political Stigma¹

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to probe the critique against Ethiopia regarding human rights violations along ethnic and racial lines recently raised by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The article compares the Ethiopian government's stated policy on human and group rights with reported human rights violations in Ethiopia per ethnic regional-state for the purpose of identifying possible "ethnic" patterns of violations. The findings of this article partly question, from a methodological perspective, the categorical classification of "human rights violations along ethnic and racial lines" as expressed by CERD. Violations may certainly be interpreted within an ethnic framework; however, one should also make allowances for a non-ethnic approach to human rights abuses and view the two perspectives as mutually complimentary.

Keywords

Ethiopia, CERD, racial discrimination, human rights, ethnicity, group rights, federalism

1. Introduction

The transformation of Ethiopia from a unitary to an ethnic federal state in 1994 was intended to herald a new era of minority and group rights protection in the country. The current government constituted by the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which seized power in 1991, introduced a new constitutional framework and a federal system in order to arrest the strong and suppressive central governmental structures and to redress ethno-national grievances among the many ethnic groups in the country.³ The federal provisions enshrined in

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³ J. Abbink, 'Breaking and Making the State: The Dynamics of Ethnic Democracy in Ethiopia', 13:2 *Journal of Contemporary Africa Studies* (1995); J. Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in

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