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Preface

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) for the federal and state parliamentary elections in Ethiopia was established in March 2005. The EU EOM was formally invited by the Ethiopian government and the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) to observe the elections on 15 May. It was the first time international observers were invited to observe elections in Ethiopia. In addition to the EU EOM, observers from the Carter Center and the African Union (AU) observed the elections.

The mission was established to make a contribution to the democratization of Ethiopia by delivering an independent, professional and impartial assessment of the elections. The mandate was to accompany the electoral process in order to encourage its transparency and the citizens’ confidence in the political rights linked to the vote.

The core team of nine staff members arrived in Ethiopia on 18 March. 52 long-term observers (LTOs) arrived on 15 April and stayed until 3 June. The core team’s country expert, Siegfried Pausewang, a senior researcher at the Christian Michelsen Institute in Bergen in Norway, had to leave the mission before the LTOs arrived after being criticized by the Ethiopian government for articles written about Ethiopia before his assignment for the EU EOM. 100 short-term observers (STOs) arrived on 6 May and were deployed until 19 May. EU EOM continued the mission in Ethiopia until 8 September with a core team and six LTOs present.

The mission was led by Chief Observer Ms Ana Gomes, a Portuguese national and member of the European Parliament. It was one of the largest election observation missions ever established by the European Union. On election day 1034 polling stations were visited.

NORDEM seconded two LTOs, Espen Pettersen and Elisabeth Salvesen, who were deployed in North and West Shewa and in Bale, both in Oromia region. NORDEM also recruited two STOs, Nils Gunnar Songstad and Toril Lund, who were deployed in West Wollega Zone and in Nazreth in the zone of East Shewa, both in Oromia.

The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights / NORDEM
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June 2006
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Map of Country
Introduction

The elections on 15 May were elections to the House of Peoples’ Representatives and to the regional councils. The elections in the Somali region took place on 21 August (23 seats). The parliamentary elections were the third of its kind since multi-party elections were introduced in 1995.

In a preliminary statement on the 17 May, the EU EOM rather positively commended the high voter turnout, the increased degree of competitiveness compared to previous elections and the peaceful atmosphere on election day. The EOM, however, also noted that political rights were not fully protected and that human rights violations occurred in the pre-election period. Moreover, “(t)he voter and counting operation at the polling stations was completed despite a shortage of material and organization resources, particularly in urban areas, the effect of which was partly mitigated by an extension of polling hours.”

On 24 May the situation had changed significantly and the EU EOM issued a critical statement on the vote count and release of electoral results. The EU EOM noted several irregular practices, which “are seriously undermining the transparency and fairness of the elections. They also risk increasing the scope for manipulation and consequently putting in doubt public confidence in the process.”

In March 2006 the EU EOM published its final report on the elections including the appeals process, the repeat elections and the elections in the Somali region on 21 August 2005. The EOM noted that “the complaints and appeals mechanisms did not provide an effective remedy. The human rights situation rapidly deteriorated in the post-election day period when dozens of citizens were killed by the police and thousands were arrested. Overall, therefore, the elections fell short of international principles for genuine democratic elections.”

Political background

The Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-36 and 1941-74) was overthrown in 1974 after serious famine and political unrest. The military established a leftist dictatorship headed by Haile Mengistu Mariam. The ruling military committee, called the Derg, issued a land reform declaration which abolished all rights of the old feudal aristocracy. All land was to be the property of the Ethiopian people.

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1 EU Preliminary statement 17 May 2005. All the EU statements and reports can be accessed on http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/ethiopia/index.htm

2 EU Preliminary statement 24 May 2005
The Derg regime (1974-91) had close links to the USSR. The civil war against the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People’s Liberation Movement (TPLF) continued until the Derg regime was overthrown in 1991.

The ruling party Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was founded by the TPLF when they took over power together with EPLF in 1991. EPRDF invited all ethnic resistance movements to form a transitional government and take part in making a “Transitional Charter” that was to function as Ethiopia’s constitution until a new constitution could be ratified.

A year later, in the local elections of 1992, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the strongest of the ethnic movements outside the EPRDF, left the transitional government and went into opposition. Several OLF candidates and their families were threatened and arrested and faced torture and murder. Several other ethnic movements left the transitional government the following year. There have been several local, regional and federal elections in Ethiopia since then, with a history of heavy electoral manipulation.

Today EPRDF is a coalition of four parties; Amhara People’s Democratic Movement, Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO), Southern Ethiopia People’s Democratic Movement and Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front. EPRDF is essentially an agrarian based Marxist-Leninist party that in recent years has recognized the need to launch a process of transition from a command economic and political model to a mixed economy within a more democratic and pluralistic governance structure.

Two main opposition coalitions contested the ruling party in the elections; United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD).

UEDF was established at a conference in Washington D.C in 2003. Today UEDF includes 5 parties based in Ethiopia and 9 parties in exile abroad. The domestic parties are All Amhara People’s Organization, Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party, Oromo National Congress (ONC), Ethiopian Social Democratic Federalist Party and Southern Ethiopia People’s Democratic Coalition. UEDF is not satisfied with the existing system of ethnic federalism and wants more power to the various ethnic groups.

CUD consists of four main parties; Ethiopian Democratic League, All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP), Rainbow Ethiopia: Movement for Democracy and Social Justice and United Ethiopian Democratic Party (UEDP-Medhin). AEUP and UEDP-Medhin withdrew from the opposition-coalition UEDF in September 2004 and created CUD which is composed entirely of parties based in Ethiopia. CUD has warned against the risks involved in the system of ethnic federalism, which could lead to a disintegration of Ethiopia. In the election campaign CUD focused primarily on education.

The Unity of Southern Ethiopian Democratic Forces and Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Coalition have been formed more recently. All together, 76 parties and independent candidates were registered for the House of Peoples’ Representatives and the Regional Councils.

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1 EU EOMs LTO Reference Booklet 2005
3 EU EOMs LTO Reference Booklet 2005
All the Norwegian LTOs and STOs observed the elections in the Oromia region and left Ethiopia at the end of May or beginning of June 2005. In Oromia, 8 political parties/coalitions and some independent candidates ran for the elections. The parties were:

- OPDO (EPRDF coalition)
- ONC (UEDF coalition)
- AEUP (CUD coalition)
- OALF (Oromo Abbo Liberation Front)
- OLUF (Oromo Liberation Unity Front)
- OFDM (Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement)
- GSAP (Geda System Advancement Party)
- OLNP (Oromo Liberation National Party)

The Oromo are the largest single ethnic group in Ethiopia, accounting for 40 percent of the population. There is still some unrest in the south of Oromia and even Oromo unaffiliated with militant and violent organizations are still targeted and subjected to governmental abuse and detention.6

The Legislative Framework

The main legal instruments governing the 2005 elections were the 1994 constitution and the election law of 1995. The election law was amended before the 2005 elections.

The EU EOM’s assessment of the elections is made against international standards, notably article 25 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966, which has been ratified by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The main concerns raised by the EU EOM regarding the legal framework for elections was that it changed a few weeks prior to the election, in the form of amendments to the penal code on media issues, and the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) directive barring most NGOs from observing the elections. The national courts later reversed this decision. However, as the reversion occurred only shortly before the elections, it is generally assumed that several NGOs were prevented from observing the elections due to organizational difficulties created by the lateness of the court decision.

In its final report the EU EOM stressed that although the legal framework was largely adequate for the holding of democratic elections, a number of concerns needed to be addressed. ‘‘The apportionment of constituencies for the House of Peoples’ Representatives violates the principle of equality of votes and there is an unreasonable restriction on the number of candidatures, which can discriminate against independent candidates. There are also concerns regarding the legal set-up of the NEBE and its

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The Federal system

Ethiopia is divided into 9 regions and 2 city administrations. The regions are: Harari, Benshangul Gumuz, Oromiya, Gambela, Somali, SNNP (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples), Amhara, Afar and Tigray. There are city administrations in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. The Federal government and the regions have executive, legislative and judicial powers.

The Parliament is bicameral and consists of the upper chamber, the House of Federation, and the lower chamber, the House of Peoples’ Representatives. The upper chamber has 108 seats, to which members are chosen by regional assemblies to serve 5-year terms, whereas the lower chamber has up to 550 seats (currently 547), to which members are directly elected by popular vote from single member constituencies to serve five-year terms. This electoral system is referred to as “first past the post” where the candidate receiving more votes than any competitor within a constituency, is declared the winner of the constituency seat in the House of Peoples’ Representatives. The House of Federation is composed of representatives of “nations, nationalities, and peoples” of Ethiopia, in proportion to the population. Every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has a right to self determination, including the right to secession, as stated in article 39 of the constitution.

The regional system

The elections for the Regional Councils of the nine regions and for Addis Ababa city administration follows the same system as for the parliamentary elections, however, the constituencies are multi mandate, and the voters cast their votes for as many candidates as there are determined for each constituency. The candidates with the largest number of votes in their respective constituencies win a seat in the Regional Council. The number of seats per constituency is decided by the NEBE based on regional constitutions or laws. Currently the seats are distributed as follows; Addis Ababa Constituencies 6 seats each, Tigray 4; Afar 11; Amhara 2; Oromiya 3; Somali 3; Benshangul-Gumuz 10 and SNNP 3, whereas the constituencies in Gambela and Harari have a varying number of seats in the Regional Council.

The Electoral Administration

The main body of the electoral administration is the NEBE, which was established in 1993 as an independent body for conducting democratic elections in Federal and State constituencies.

In the preliminary statement by the EU EOM on 17 May, the elections were described as “generally well prepared and effectively conducted, albeit with certain shortcomings.” The EOM noted that “the administrative procedures and the overall conduct of polling by the NEBE and sub-national electoral authorities were more transparent than ever
before.” The registration of voters and candidates and the preparations for the polling operation were generally efficient and within the prescribed deadlines.

Each of the 547 constituencies in Ethiopia elects one member of the parliament each. Each constituency has a board of election officers who are responsible for the election in the constituency and who organize and oversee the activity of the polling stations. They are also responsible for the training of the polling station staff. The NEBE conducted cascade training, reaching from the central to the polling station level. According to the election manual, the main criteria for being an election officer were non-membership of a political party, literacy and residence within the administrative unit where the electoral office or polling station was established. The Norwegian observers’ experience when meeting with polling station officials was that they very quickly pointed out that they were free from any party affiliation.

In addition to the constituency election commission, a Constituency Coordinator was appointed to coordinate the flow of information between NEBE and up to 10 constituency election commissions. However, the individual constituency election commission could also communicate directly with the NEBE if communication means allowed.

The EU EOM assessed that NEBE did not enjoy the confidence of opposition parties but that it nevertheless “made efforts to reach out by convening regular meetings with political parties to try to address problems that arose. While NEBE generally organized the process efficiently until election day, it contributed to the significant delays in counting and aggregation after election day.”

Voter and Civic Education

The international community had contributed to voter and civic education through the London-based organization ERIS. However, according to the EU EOM, as much as 10 percent of the votes cast in many polling stations observed were deemed to be invalid. In some cases the percentage was even higher. The high estimate of invalid votes shows a pressing need for voter and civic education in Ethiopia.

Voter Registration

The EU EOM was not present during the voter registration period and did not observe the voter registration process.

The voter registration took place from 9 January to 9 February 2005. To be eligible to register to vote, a person has to be 18 years old on the day of registration. 25 605 851 voters were registered for the elections. Of these 13 265 721 were men and 12 340 089

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7 www.eris.org.uk
women. In Oromia, there were 9 177 520 registered voters; 4 840 270 men and 4 337 250 women. The rate of voter registration was estimated at 85 percent of the total eligible population.

In previous elections, the students of higher institutions have not had the right to register and vote. In the present elections this was changed after a dialogue between students and NEBE. The students of universities and colleges were allowed to vote in specially designed polling stations within the university campuses. The ballots were counted in the constituency where their relatives were registered.

Candidate registration

The EU EOM was also not present during the candidate registration period and did consequently not observe the process.

1847 candidates were registered for the House of Peoples’ Representatives. 353 of these candidates were independent candidates. Only 14 percent of the candidates were women. For the Regional Councils election, 3762 candidates were registered; 2936 men and 826 women. EPRDF had most women candidates at all levels and imposed female quotas on candidates to the national parliament. No laws or rules concerning women’s representation exist in Ethiopia. Oromia elected 178 Representatives to the 547 seats parliament. In Oromia, each constituency also elected 3 representatives to the Regional Council.

The Election campaign

The EU EOM assessed that all relevant political forces participated in the electoral race. All parties also had fair access to publicly owned media before the election. Unprecedented debates broadcast on radio and television between opposition and government representatives were a positive development that allowed for a genuine exchange of views on issues of public concern.

A Joint Political Party Forum (JPPF) was established both at national and constituency level. JPPF met regularly with the electoral authorities with the purpose of discussing and solving campaign and election-administration problems.

The massive rallies of EPRDF and CUD at the closure of the campaign in Addis Ababa were of a peaceful character.

On the negative side the EU EOM highlights some local authorities’ use of administrative obstacles in relation to the rallies of the opposition. Political opponents were intimidated and threatened by kebelle8 administrators and militias. Opposition rallies were disrupted by militia or EPRDF-supporters, shots fired and people beaten.

8 The lowest administrative level.
Imprisonment or detention of opposition candidates, members or supporters took place. Several young political activists from the opposition were killed. The last ten days ahead of the election the threats and intimidation intensified.

EPRDF often used state assets like cars and offices in their election campaigning. Electoral authorities were perceived as partial by most opposition parties. In Bale zone in Oromia, party posters were stored in the office of the head of the woreda administration in several constituencies.

The NEBEs decision not to allow campaigning in markets created considerable discussion and was especially criticized by the opposition parties. The opposition’s argument was that in the rural areas, markets were often the only place for it to campaign, as the ruling party obstructed announced political meetings – for example by issuing permissions too late for a proper announcement of meetings.

In Oromia, in the Bale Zone town Robe, the opposition party ONC also arranged a campaign rally with more than 1000 participants. The CUD coalition several times complained that their candidates faced severe problems and threats from the militia when they tried to arrange meetings. CUD had an office in Goba town and campaigned along the streets in some villages in the zone.

In the Bale Zone, the opposition parties were not particularly visible until the last week before the election, when most of them received their campaign materials. OPDO arranged two big campaign rallies in Goba town in Bale with approximately 2500 and 3000 participants. Both rallies were very well organized. The candidates’ main message was that they would guarantee peace and democracy and that people should vote for the people they knew. They warned against the opposition, hinting that they had been in exile and supported the Derg regime or OLF. Several people said that they had been forced to be present at the OPDO rally. At the end of one of the OPDO rallies, the opposition party OALF started its own rally. Many people leaving the OPDO rally subsequently joined the OALF rally. In Bale Zone, OPDO also arranged a lot of campaign meetings at kebelle level. People claimed they were forced to participate in the meetings.

In many of the constituencies in Bale Zone, opposition candidates withdrew from the election during the last 10 days before election day. They were candidates for both House of Peoples’ Representatives and Regional Councils and withdrew for different reasons. Some received serious threats against themselves and their families or were told that they risked losing their jobs. However, they may also have been bribed or in fact been OPDO-infiltrators.

In North Shewa, the election campaign started late for the opposition, mainly the CUD, whereas in West Shewa, the Oromo National Congress (ONC) carried out many campaign activities and were visible throughout the zone during the pre-election period. The leader of ONC and UEDF, Dr Merare Gudina, had his home constituency in Guder, a town near Ambo. He campaigned extensively throughout the zone, and his rallies drew thousands of supporters, mostly young men in their twenties.

The campaigning in West Shewa was tainted by mass arrests by the police of ONC supporters due to what was described by the police as election related crimes, such as tearing of posters, illegal campaigning in the market places etc. The nature of the alleged

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9 The administrative level that generally corresponds with the constituency.
crimes makes it difficult to assess the legitimacy of the arrests; however there was a clear pattern of arrests of ONC supporters. It was also reported to the team that the arrested ONC supporters went through speedy trials and were given one month sentences, which prevented them from voting and campaigning for the ONC.

It was difficult to verify these claims. However, in Gebre Gurache in North Shewa, the police confirmed the arrest of several ONC supporters, who were going through a speedy trial.

During the campaigning period in Baabich in West Shewa, an 80 year old clan leader was arrested by the police for “disturbing the peace of the town.” The old clan leader was a supporter of EPRDF during the last elections, but had now chosen to support the ONC. No explanation was given by the police to the team on the specifics of how an 80 year old man could disturb the peace of the town in such a way to warrant his arrest. When the team later visited the Zone Commander a few days prior to the elections, the old man had been released and all charges against him had been dropped.

In Chelia, during the pre-election period, a young ONC supporter was shot dead by two police officers after an argument in a hotel. The NEBE conducted an investigation into the matter together with representatives from the ruling party and the opposition, and agreed to leave the matter to the local courts.

The ruling party seemed to use the state apparatus for their campaign. People were invited to the kebelle administration offices for town information meetings, which in reality were political campaign meetings for the EPRDF. Posters for the EPRDF could be seen everywhere.

The Media

In Ethiopia, about 60 percent of the population are illiterate, according to UNESCO. 20 percent have a radio and less than 1 percent has TV. Ethiopian TV (ETV) and Radio Ethiopia are owned and controlled by the state and are the only licensed channels. The state also owns the Ethiopia News Agency and two of the three daily newspapers. There are, however, several private publications or newspapers that are published twice a week. They have a modest print run and are often critical towards the government.

Freedom of speech and press is regulated by the Constitution and the 1992 Press Law. Reporters without borders, Article 19 and many European countries, including Norway, have criticized the many incidents of harassment, imprisonment and killings of journalists. They have also heavily criticized the draft of a new Press Law proposed by the government. In the beginning of April 2005, however, the government decided to include fifteen articles from the Draft Press Law in the new Penal Code. This was approved by the parliament and came into force on 8 May. The amendment gave rise to strong criticism by the private media. Some of the provisions establish criminal liability for anyone in the production or distribution line if the author or editor of an article cannot be identified.

10 EU EOM Reference Manual Ethiopia 2005
The Ministry of Information and the Ethiopian Broadcasting Agency decided to allocate free time on the state media to all parties. EPRDF received 44 percent of the coverage and the opposition parties 56 percent. This signifies a notable opening-up of the state media to the parties contending the elections. The debates on ETV with the main political actors showed an effort on the side of the government to establish a mechanism for genuine political debate.

However, in the weeks ahead of the elections, the state media followed the prime minister and covered all his activities very closely, presenting him as an important statesman meeting with the most central politicians in the world. Some of these meetings had taken place a long time before the elections. When a central EPRDF-candidate travelled to some of the regions outside the capital, ETV covered the visit in every detail. The opposition parties’ rallies, except in the capital, were not covered by ETV.

Negative campaigning in the media also took place. On 15 April, the EPRDF deputy prime minister was recorded at a televised debate associating the genocide in Rwanda with the political programmes of “certain parties”. Unfair radio and TV campaigning increased the last two weeks ahead of the elections and images and messages were used that were intended to associate the opposition with the Rwanda genocide. An EPRDF banner had the slogan “Let us not give a chance to Interahamwe.” At the same time, the EPRDF repeated its slogan “If you want peace, vote EPRDF.” UEDF answered by showing images of the movie “Hotel Rwanda.”

Observation on the Polling Day

The elections were generally held in a peaceful and orderly manner, with the exception of some isolated incidents. The voter turnout was high and almost everywhere people waited patiently even though the queues were very long. Some voters had to wait for half a day. Most polling stations had only one voting booth. Polling hours were extended by two hours in order to remedy this situation.

The opening of polling stations generally occurred on time. All five members of polling staff were present at most polling stations (93 percent of all polling stations) and so were the 5 public observers from the community (93 percent).

Domestic observers were seen in about half of the polling stations. The NEBE’s ban on election observation by domestic civil organizations/NGOs that did not have election observation listed in their statutes as one of their main tasks, was as previously mentioned overturned by the Federal High Court and the Supreme Court. However, the decision came too late for widespread mobilization in rural areas.

Campaign materials were very infrequently observed in or around the polling stations. Only a few incidents of intimidation were observed and there was no evidence of multiple voting or ballot stuffing. The secrecy of the vote was generally secured. The ballot boxes were properly zipped and sealed in 96 percent of the observed polling stations. The voting process was considered “very good” or “good” in 77 percent of the polling stations observed.

However, the EU EOM received complaints from CUD and UEDF that their observers had been expelled and harassed in the course of their work in some locations. On
average, 30 percent of the polling stations observed had no opposition party candidates present. In some cases this may have been the result of threats or expulsions and in other cases rather of a lack of capacity.

**Election day report by LTO Espen Pettersen**

The team observed the polling in West and North Shewa in the Oromia region.

**Observation of the polling**

The polling was generally conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere, although there were exceptions. The team visited 12 polling stations during election day. Generally the polling stations visited were well organized and the rules and regulations were mainly followed.

In Guder, the hometown of Dr Merare Gudina, leader of the ONC and the UEDF, the team visited a polling station where serious irregularities were taking place. The *kebelle* chairman was present in the polling station, instructing voters to vote for EPRDF. The *kebelle* chairman had no official capacity in the polling station. He also had his men outside the polling station, who were chasing away all young people believed to be ONC supporters, telling them they were not allowed to vote because they were too young - even though they could produce a voting card. The ballot box in the polling station was not sealed. The ONC representative present in the capacity of observer told the team that he had been threatened by the police and that he would be arrested after the elections unless he left the polling station.

All the polling stations visited had 5 public observers, who were said to be elected by the community. However, they did not seem to be interested at all in the election process and were often seen paying no attention to what was going on in the polling station.

The complaints committee, which was supposed to consist of the polling station chairman and two of the public observers, generally seemed to be elected on the spot when the team asked about it.

**Observation of the closing and counting**

The closing and counting in West Shewa was generally conducted in accordance with the rules and regulations. In Guder, the counting was stopped on election night at the order of the *kebelle* administrator. The counting of the votes was resumed the next day and proceeded in accordance with the regulations.

In Ginchi, the STO team was unable to observe the counting because the polling station had closed at 15.30 and conducted the counting immediately afterwards. The polling station staff there stated that everybody had already voted by 15.30 and those who had not were either out of town or deceased.

In Ambo town, the polling station closed at 19.00, and procedures for counting were followed. The EPRDF representative present received instructions from party colleagues outside the polling station to “wait until the counting was finished and then to declare the count to be invalid.” The counting took all night and when it became apparent that the ONC had won by a landslide, the EPRDF representative disappeared without signing the forms. The polling station chairman was reluctant to give a signed copy of the results to the ONC representative present, but eventually did so. The posters announcing the results were not displayed outside the polling station as stipulated in the rules and the polling station chairman stated in private to the team that due to the results of the
election he did not dare to display the results because he feared for his life and personal security. He feared that he would be held personally responsible for the loss of the ruling party in his polling station. When the team met with him later the next day he seemed more relaxed, as he had met with other polling station chairmen who reported similar results. He consequently agreed to put up the results outside of his polling station.

**Observation of the tabulation**

The tabulation at zone level in West Shewa was observed closely by the party representatives. The opposition party leaders assured the team that they did not have any concerns about fraud at this stage of the election process due to the fact that the party representatives closely observed the election officials at all times. The party leaders had also collected their own results and checked the official results against these.

The election officials in Ambo, who were responsible for the aggregation of the results, stated to the team that they were afraid for their own security and that they feared they would lose their jobs as a consequence of the election results.

**Election day report by LTO Elisabeth Salvesen**

The team observed voting in the Bale Zone in Oromia region. Bale is located at the outskirts of Bale Mountains National Park, a very rural and not much developed part of Ethiopia. The infrastructure in the area is poor and roads vanish completely when it rains. Many polling stations were only accessible by mules, camels or by foot. The transport of ballots would take three to four days – and even more if it rained. The LTO team deployed one STO team in the area of responsibility, which had 10 constituencies and more than 750 polling stations. The majority of the population in the area are Muslim, but there is also a sizeable group of mainly Orthodox Christians.

The political tension in the area of responsibility rose as the election came closer. In general OPDO was visible everywhere, while the opposition parties seemed poorly organized, short of resources and suffering considerable pressure in different ways from the ruling party. The opposition complained about receiving many threats.

**Observation of the polling**

The polling stations observed opened in time and people were queuing even before the opening hour. At most polling stations the voters waited patiently, but in a few places there was complete chaos. In many places women were allowed to vote first.

The head of the polling station provided information to voters outside the polling stations in most places and explained how to cast a vote, the difference between the two different ballot papers and how many candidates to vote for. At a few polling stations observed, the ruling party was obviously favoured.

**Observation of the closing and counting**

The teams observed the closing and counting at polling stations in more urban areas, Robe and Adaba.

In Adaba the election board at the observed polling station did not count the total number of votes before they started counting the votes for each candidate. There was bad light in the polling station and it was sometimes difficult to see the difference between the colours blue and green, which marked the two respective elections. The counting finished at 01.00 and the election board agreed to wait posting the results outside until the next morning.
In Robe the observed closing and counting process was completely chaotic and was not fully completed. The election board sorted out the ballots and counted the results over and over again. It was difficult to assess whether the reason for the chaos was a lack of skill from the side of the election board chairman or a lack of will among several of the election board members. The opposition candidate present was very young and inexperienced and was only concerned about how many votes his party received. After a couple of hours, the election board received assistance from another board. At 03.00 they all agreed to stop counting and to continue the next day.

**Observation of the tabulation**

At many polling stations in the area of responsibility the results were not displayed until mid-day the day after election day. At the same time, the first ballot boxes were delivered to the constituencies. The STOs observed the tabulation in Adaba and Dodola, and the LTOs observed in Goba and Robe. In both places, most of the ballot boxes were delivered by Wednesday. In other constituencies, such as Goro and Ginir, the tabulation lasted for more than a week, probably because of transport problems from the most rural areas. However, other reasons such as fraud cannot be excluded. The election results in some places, like Agarfa and Ginir, seemed implausible with a 100 percent turnout and 100 percent of the votes cast for OPDO. Other polling stations also had a turnout of 95 percent and the same percentage of votes cast for OPDO.

In Robe, Dodola and Adaba, opposition parties won the seat for the House of Peoples’ Representatives. In the seven other constituencies in Bale, OPDO won.

On Wednesday 18 May, opposition candidates in Robe and election board chairmen in Dodola and Adaba received serious threats because the election results seemed to be in favour of the opposition parties. The LTOs immediately called for a meeting with the woreda administration, stressing that the security of the opposition candidates and the election board members was their obvious responsibility. They agreed on having a meeting with the opposition parties every morning the following weeks in order to sort out possible problems in the new political situation.

The following day, the LTOs were present when the election board chairman in Robe signed the confirmation of the election results giving ONC the House of Peoples’ Representatives seat and one Regional Council seat as well. The chairman was obviously under a lot of pressure and also phoned and consulted the NEBE in Addis Ababa. Later he told the LTOs that he was afraid he would soon lose his job in the education department of the woreda administration because he had “allowed” the opposition to win in Robe.

The LTOs also visited Adaba and Dodola constituency election boards and were told about the serious threats they had received. They board members feared that they would lose their jobs in the woreda administration if they did not change the election results in favour of OPDO. Polling station officials had also been threatened and told by the ruling party’s cadres that they would lose their jobs if they let the opposition win.

**Election day report by STO Toril Lund**

The STO team’s area of responsibility was concentrated in and around the city of Nazreth which is situated approximately 100 km south of Addis Ababa. Nazreth is the provincial capital in the Oromia region and is also the administrative centre in the zone of East Shewa. This zone had registered nearly half a million voters; 279 920 male and 197 056 female.
The party OPDO ran for the EPRDF coalition. There were two parties running for CUD; AEUP and UEDP. In East Shewa all five parties, AAPO, EDU, ESDFP, ONC and SEPDC, ran for the UEDF coalition. In the area of responsibility all female candidates were from OPDO except one ONC candidate.

The team observed in the four constituencies of Adama 1, 2 and 3 and Mojo, which had an approximate number of 200 000 registered voters. Most of the polling stations observed by the team were situated in rural areas.

Observation during the days before the election revealed that the polling stations in the rural areas were guarded by armed personnel. The guards were not in uniform and had received their weapons from their respective kebelle authorities. The armed guards were more numerous than the uniformed police observed outside the polling stations on election day.

**Observation of the opening**

At 05:15 in the morning the team observed long queues of thousands of voters lining up outside the polling stations in the city. Smaller queues could also be observed in rural areas.

The polling station observed opened on time. All election materials were present and the procedures for the counting and registering of ballots were followed.

The team observed a so called “coordinator” who was not a member of the election board but who instructed people how to vote. He went behind the booth with some of the voters, appointed a reporter to sit by a telephone in order to receive and make calls and orchestrated much of the opening procedures. Upon question from the team this man was identified as an EPRDF representative.

**Observation of the polling**

In all of the polling stations observed the polling procedures regarding registration of voters, proper IDs and checks and application of ink were followed in accordance with the manual. However, the team observed several instances of “coordinators” in the polling stations. They were neither election board members nor community observers. They played an active role in the polling stations and gave instructions to the voters and even the election board members.

In one polling station the team was approached by some young voters who complained that an election board chair had collected their voter cards and that they consequently were unable to vote. The team observed that the chair had a pile of some fifty voter cards. According to the chair they were collected in order to conduct a better organized voting process.

**Observation of closing and counting**

The closing procedures were organized not by the election board chair, but by an EPRDF party member. The latter also tried to organize the counting, but was closely followed up and corrected by a female opposition party observer. The team observed that she played an active part throughout the counting process with regard to following up the EPRDF party member.

The election board members were not adequately trained for the counting procedures. They did not know how to conduct the counting and how to fill in the forms. Eventually an election board chair from a neighbouring polling station took the lead and finalized the process.
In Adama 2, where the team observed the voting, ONC received the majority of the votes. CUD won in most of the other rural polling stations in Mojo constituency, with the exception of Dibandida and Shera, where UEDF received most of the votes.

During election day the team was approached by a number of voters who had complaints about the conduct of the polling and counting process. The regulations described a Complaints Committee in the polling stations, but such a committee was neither observed in the polling stations, nor was it known to the voters. The team observed many complaints being made, but none being officially lodged. The EU EOM was therefore not able to properly register the situation with regards to complaints.

**Election day report by STO Nils Gunnar Songstad**

The team was deployed to West Wollega Zone in Oromia region. West Wollega borders Sudan and its administrative centre, Gimbi, is located approximately 450 km west of Addis Ababa. Due to the vast area of responsibility the team was only able to cover Gimbi and the adjacent constituency, Enango Bila, on election day. The two constituencies had 62 and 66 polling stations respectively. The total number of registered voters was 45 225 in Gimbi and 41 627 in Enango Bila. Both constituencies had a small number of urban polling stations, seven and two respectively. In Gimbi, Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) and Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) fielded candidates in the federal elections. In the regional elections, each constituency in Oromia elects three members to the regional council. For these elections OPDO had fielded three candidates and CUD two candidates. Shortly before election day, the CUD candidate for the parliamentary election and one of the two CUD candidates for the regional election withdrew their candidatures.

**Observation of the opening**

The opening of the polling was observed at an urban polling station in Gimbi. When the team arrived at the polling station shortly before 0600, several hundred voters were waiting outside. The prescribed procedures for opening the polling station were followed. The team noticed that blank ballot papers were stored several places in the polling station. However, the stamped and signed ballot papers were administered and handed to the voters by the polling station officials as prescribed.

**Observation of the polling**

The team visited 12 polling stations in Gimbi and Enango Bila on election day. The turnout appeared to be high and long queues were observed at most polling stations. The team was very impressed by the patience demonstrated by the voters. At some polling stations voters were separated in two lines, one for the men and one for the women. The polling was generally conducted in accordance with the regulations in all polling stations. The election officials seemed to be well qualified and managed to run the election process without any notable problems. The minor deviations from the prescribed procedures concerned the briefing of the voters which was conducted at only half of the polling stations and the complaints committee which sometimes seemed to be appointed ad hoc by the chairman of the polling station when the observer team asked about it. In Gimbi, several polling stations were located in kebelle offices and at a few of these the OPDO flag was flying outside.

**Observation of the closing and counting**
The team chose one of the biggest polling stations in Gimbi, with 1679 voters registered, for observation of the closing and counting. The polling station closed on time, as no voters were queuing. At other polling stations in Gimbi the polling time was extended at the order of the electoral administration, as the number of voters waiting to cast their ballot at the time of the prescribed closing time was high. Before opening the ballot box, the number of used ballot papers and the number of signatures and finger prints in the voter register were counted. There was, however, a discrepancy between these figures. The polling station officials together with the candidates’ representatives and the public observers decided that the actual number of ballot papers should be decided by counting the content of the ballot box. After the count it turned out that the total number of ballot papers was 68 lower than expected, i.e. there were 68 signatures or fingerprints more in the voter register than ballot papers in the ballot box. The discrepancy was explained by the possibility of voters having signed the voter register and taken ballot papers without inserting these into the ballot box. The polling station committee, candidates’ representatives and the public observers agreed unanimously on this explanation and the total number of ballots, valid and invalid, was determined to be 1544. No recount of ballots or signatures was carried out to verify the figures. Based on this figure the turnout was 92 percent of the registered voters. By midnight, six hours after closing the polling station, the counting of the federal election was completed. The number of blank ballots was high and the combined number of blank and invalid ballots was 216. The counting of the regional election followed.

Observation of the tabulation

The team observed the Gimbi constituency election committee receiving the results from the polling stations. By 18.00 the day after election day, 44 of the 62 polling stations in Gimbi had delivered the results. Many polling stations had not filled the result forms properly and this caused delays in submitting the results from the polling stations. By the time the team left Gimbi, mid-day 17 May, only 50 of the 62 polling stations in the constituency had delivered the results. No tabulation of the overall constituency results had taken place at this point.

By 17 May the results for the federal election were displayed in five of the seven polling stations in Gimbi. The results from the two remaining polling stations were obtained from the constituency office. OFDM received the majority of the votes in all of these polling stations. In the regional election the OPDO candidates received more votes than the CUD candidate at all the polling stations in Gimbi.

The review of Complaints Process

Electoral claims and complaints can be brought before the corresponding authority at the polling station and further to the constituency electoral committee. Appeals are handled by the NEBE.

In Bale Zone there were many complaints, but very often they were only made orally and only to the LTOs. When the LTOs stressed that the parties had to use their own institutions and bring the complaints to the responsible authority, the opposition parties sometimes did, but also very often expressed a lack of confidence in the complaints.
process. Sometimes they also seemed to lack the resources to make formal complaints and to travel across the mountains to deliver them in time.

The EU EOM’s final report of March 2006 states that “(d)espite efforts by the NEBE to establish a system to deal with complaints, overall the process failed to provide an effective remedy to contestants, given that it took place in the context of serious violations of human rights and freedoms, namely of opposition leaders and suspected supporters, which undermined the opposition’s ability to participate effectively in the process.” The EU EOM also noted that there were serious concerns about whether the set up of the Complaints Investigation Panels (CIP) provided a level playing field. It was possible to appeal NEBE decisions made to the Supreme Court, but both institutions were headed by the same person, which raised questions as to whether the judiciary offered an effective remedy.

Conclusions

The Ethiopian people had high hopes for the elections, and many were of the opinion that it was the first time the country experienced real competition in elections. It was clear that many primarily wanted a change, sometimes even without knowing much about what the opposition parties would bring.

When the Norwegian LTOs left Ethiopia on 3 June 2005, it was difficult to predict what would be the actual results of the elections. 26 people were killed in Addis Ababa in the first week of June and thousands of opposition members and supporters were arrested in the following weeks and months. This was exactly what many of the opposition candidates and election board members told the LTOs that they feared just after the elections in May. The ruling party seemed to be completely shocked by their electoral losses in many places.

The findings of the Norwegian observers are in accordance with those of the EU EOM, which concluded that the elections did not meet international requirements for democratic elections, primarily because of irregularities in the counting and aggregation process, complaints mechanisms that did not provide an effective remedy and a rapid deterioration of the human rights situation in the aftermath of the elections. Criminal legislation related to the media, obstacles for domestic election observers, insufficient training of election officials, political pressure on election officials, use of state resources for the campaign of the ruling party and intimidation of opposition supporters and campaigners were matters of particular concern.

Comments on the election observation mission

The LTO teams received a lot of technical equipment, which at times was too sophisticated to be useful in the Ethiopian countryside. Examples are cell phones with no coverage in the area of responsibility and reporting requirements involving the use of
internet, which did not function on all the provided computers. In some rural areas, much of the time internet was not available because only one server covered a huge area.