



CEPPS/IRI Quarterly Report: April 1-June 30, 2005

ETHIOPIA: ELECTIONS SUPPORT ACTIVITY USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-10-00004-00

Project dates: September 1, 2004-July 31, 2006
Total budget: \$532,518 Expenses to date: \$82,736.46

I. SUMMARY

The post-election crisis in Ethiopia is a tragic second chapter to the story of the May parliamentary elections, as 37 people have been reported dead and hundreds more wounded from violence resulting from confrontation between university students protesting the electoral process and special forces deployed to defuse political tensions. The subsequent expulsion of Voice of America and Deutsche Welle journalists by the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) cast further doubt on the GOE's proclaimed commitment to free and fair elections. International condemnation of the situation, especially over acrimonious allegations between the ruling party and opposition party Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), put pressure on the political parties to sign an agreement to maintain peace. IRI has continued to consult USAID and partners in Washington, D.C., on the future and security of democratic development in Ethiopia. At this point, however, immediate initiatives to resume local democratic assistance have been postponed until after the protracted election period.

II. BACKGROUND

The government of Ethiopia made some progress towards democratic reform in the pre-election stages, as evidenced by improved administrative preparation for elections, increased public debate around political issues, and other minor concessions to opposition demands, such as increased access to state-owned media. However, implementation of reforms has been inconsistent. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi continues to state his government's commitment to democratization. The Ethiopian constitution, considered by many to be one of the most progressive in Africa, guarantees a democratic order and respect for human and democratic rights. Many in the international community had high expectations for the 2005 elections, and although Election Day surpassed most expectations, the government's handling of the post-election period has created a severe setback in Ethiopia's democratic stability.

In the first quarter of 2005, IRI was able to work closely with CEPPS partners IFES and NDI, as well as the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), which partnered with UK-based

Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS). Before its abrupt expulsion at the end of March, IRI began a *Training-of-Trainers* program for civil society election observers. Our inability to complete this program, and extend it to political party observers as planned, was an apparent detriment to the electoral observation process, as large numbers of the 299 complaints filed by over 30 political parties were rejected by the NEBE for insufficient documentation. These complaints were primarily in the rural constituencies, which may set the tone for the approaching local elections set for 2006.

In June, the NEBE itself had issued informal totals for constituencies awarding the opposition CUD 123 seats, and the other major opposition party, United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF), 56. The fact that the two parties have agreed to work together in parliament means that for the first time, the opposition, which currently has only 12 seats in parliament, will exceed the requisite one-third total needed to put forth legislation and force debate. These remarkable opposition gains included a clean sweep of the 23 seats in Addis Ababa itself, victories which removed a number of government ministers from their seats. It is currently unclear whether these results will hold: the NEBE's July 8 publication of totals for non-contested constituencies awarded lower totals to both the opposition and the government, with 135 and 139 seats going to each. The government's fear of unrest in light of such close results and allegations of fraud prompted Meles Zenawi to ban all public demonstrations for a month following the elections. Student demonstrations in defiance of this ban culminated in the conflict and death reported in the summary above.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

No activities to report in this quarter.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Objectives:

- 1. To increase the capability of Ethiopian organizations (civic and political) to observe the electoral process.*
- 2. To increase the ability of Ethiopian organizations to use observation results to expand dialogue regarding the electoral process among stakeholders from civil society, political parties and relevant governmental bodies.*

No results to report in this quarter

V. EVALUATION

No evaluation to report in this quarter.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Future activities are uncertain due to the current electoral crisis in Ethiopia. The announcement of the final election results was postponed till July 8, but even at that late date, over 200 constituencies were still the subject of complaint investigations. Once these complaints are resolved, a post-election assessment may be necessary to determine if any substantive programming can be implemented in the future. A number of possibilities for such programming present themselves. The elections which took place nationwide on May 15 were scheduled later in the Somali region, which will hold elections on August 21. Elections support activity is possible in preparation for those elections, or, on a long-term timetable, in preparation for local elections throughout Ethiopia in 2006. Alternatively, reprogramming would permit a number of new activities in response to changed conditions in Ethiopia. If a large opposition bloc takes seats in parliament in September, legislative and parliamentary training might have a dramatic impact on the ability of Ethiopia's political parties to foster a democratic dialogue in a parliament that will no longer be a mere rubber stamp. If conditions on the ground do not permit IRI to re-open an office in Ethiopia, a number of these programming options can be pursued from afar, through a rigorous program of video-conferencing and remote trainings. IRI remains available to discuss any of these possibilities.