

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

1 April 2016

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Ethiopia: The Ethiopian Satellite Television media group (ESAT), including objectives and activities in Canada, particularly in the Kitchener-Waterloo area; reports of surveillance by Ethiopian authorities (2012 - March 2016)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

Sources indicate that the Ethiopian Satellite Television Service (ESAT) is an independent TV and radio news service run by members of the Ethiopian diaspora (Freedom House 2015a; Reporters without Borders 6 Mar. 2014; Human Rights Watch Mar. 2014, 85). According to its website, ESAT was established in 2010 and is headquartered in Amsterdam, with branches in Washington, DC and London (ESAT n.d.). The same source indicates that ESAT is funded by individual donors and members of the Ethiopian diaspora and that its primary objective is to "provide free access to information to the people of Ethiopia" (ibid.). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a representative of ESAT stated that the media network has approximately one million viewers and broadcasts TV and radio programming around the world, including in Ethiopia (ibid. 21 Mar. 2016). The same source noted that ESAT's aim is "to give voice to the voiceless" and explained that the organization is challenging the Ethiopian government and bringing forward their human rights violations (ibid.). Other sources similarly describe ESAT as "critical of the Ethiopian authorities" (Reporters Without Borders 6 Mar. 2014) or "pro-opposition" (CPJ 13 July 2012). According to the *Washington Post*, ESAT "mainly employs journalists who left Ethiopia in the face of government harassment, torture or criminal charges" (12 Feb. 2014).

2. Objectives and Activities in Canada

Sources indicate that ESAT is active in Canada (ESAT 21 Mar. 2016; EAN 23 Mar. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Ethiopian Advocacy Network (EAN), a US-based organization established in 2015 that promotes "democracy, human rights and justice in Ethiopia through advocacy, civic education and grassroots mobilization," stated that the primary objectives and activities of ESAT in Canada are to provide Ethiopian communities in Canada with an alternative and independent information source about the conditions in Ethiopia and to "expand the base of support for ESAT within the Ethiopian communities in Canada by forming support groups in various cities" (ibid.). The ESAT representative indicated that there are ESAT support groups all over Canada (ESAT 21 Mar. 2016). She explained that support groups are involved with membership and fundraising (ibid.). Sources specifically noted that there are support groups in Toronto, Calgary (ibid; EAN 23 Mar. 2016), Vancouver (ibid.) and Edmonton (ESAT 21 Mar. 2016).

Regarding ESAT activity in Kitchener/Waterloo, the ESAT representative stated that a small support group established itself in the region over the past year (ibid.). The EAN representative indicated that ESAT has "supporters" in the Kitchener/Waterloo area, as well as in other cities in Canada (EAN 23 Mar. 2016).

According to the EAN representative, the ESAT IT team support head lives in Vancouver, but he was not aware of any ESAT reporters who live in Canada (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Government Surveillance and Treatment of ESAT Staff and Supporters

Sources report that Ethiopian authorities have targeted ESAT employees in the US and Belgium with surveillance spyware (Citizen Lab Mar. 2015, 1-2; *The Washington Post* 12 Feb. 2014). The Citizen Lab, a lab based at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto that focuses on research related to "Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), human rights, and global security" (n.d.), analysed e-mails and attachments sent to ESAT employees in the US, and found that the correspondence contained Remote Control System (RCS) spyware and linked the attack to a governmental agency in Ethiopia (Citizen Lab Mar. 2015, 1). Hacking Team, the developer that sells this RCS spyware, reportedly only sells their products to government agencies (Reporters Without Borders 6 Mar. 2014; Freedom House 2015; Human Rights Watch 9 Mar. 2015). Sources note that if the spyware is successfully installed, it would allow the user access to the target's e-mails, files, contact lists, and audio and video from the device's microphone and camera (ibid.; *The Washington Post* 12 Feb. 2014). The Citizen Lab reports that ESAT journalists were targeted with spyware on at least five occasions between 20 December 2013 and 19 December 2014 (Citizen Lab Mar. 2015, 15).

Sources indicate that ESAT's television broadcasting into Ethiopia has been jammed on a number of occasions (Human Rights Watch Mar. 2014, 85; ESAT 21 Mar. 2016). The ESAT representative specified that it has been jammed by the Ethiopian government over 20 times (ibid.). Human Rights Watch reports that ESAT's short-waved radio programming in Ethiopia is also "routinely jammed" (Human Rights Watch Mar. 2014, 87).

According to a 2015 Human Rights Watch report entitled "*Journalism is not a Crime: Violations of Media Freedom in Ethiopia*", members of the Ethiopian diaspora who appeared on ESAT have reported being "intimidated" by Ethiopian security officials outside of Ethiopia or have had family members inside Ethiopia targeted after appearing on the ESAT network (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2015, 27-28). The same source reports that Ethiopian diaspora journalists have received threats via telephone, Internet and in person (ibid., 28). Freedom House similarly states that Ethiopian journalists in the diaspora have been "targeted for harassment" (Freedom House 2015b).

Sources report that three individuals were charged and tried in absentia by Ethiopian authorities in 2012 because of their activities with ESAT (Human Rights Watch Mar. 2014, 85; Reporters without Borders 6 Mar. 2014; CPJ 13 July 2012). The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) indicates that the ESAT journalists were convicted under "vague" and "baseless" terrorism charges; two were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, while one was sentenced to life imprisonment for the second time (ibid.).

Reports of incidents of surveillance of ESAT affiliates and supporters in Canada by Ethiopian authorities could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The EAN representative stated:

While we [EAN] cannot confirm specific cases of surveillance against ESAT supporters in Canada, there are multiple reports on the Ethiopian authorities' use of cyber surveillance and cyber-attacks/hacking against journalists, human rights activists, and political dissidents residing in US and Europe. It is also not uncommon to see supporters of the Ethiopian government with cameras at ESAT and other events. There is a widespread fear among the Ethiopian communities that the government is engaged in intimidating Ethiopians living abroad through surveillance. Thus we have no reason to believe the regime will refrain from targeting anyone who is affiliated with ESAT, human rights activists or political dissidents who live in Canada. (EAN 23 Mar. 2016)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

The Citizen Lab. March 2015. Bill Marczak, John Scott-Railton and Sarah McKune. [Hacking Team Reloaded? US-Based Ethiopian Journalists Again Targeted with Spyware](#). [Accessed 19 Feb. 2016]

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Human Rights Watch. March 2014. "[They Know Everything We Do](#)": *Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia*. [Accessed 22 Mar. 2016]

Reporters Without Borders. 6 March 2014. "[Ethiopia: Full Online Powers](#)." [Accessed 16 Mar. 2016]

The Washington Post. 12 February 2014. Craig Timberg. "[Foreign Regimes Use Spyware Against Journalists, Even in U.S.](#)" [Accessed 19 Feb. 2016]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Ethiopian Association in the GTA; Human Rights Watch; Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners; Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia; Two professors.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Article 19; eoi.net; Ethiopian Association in the GTA; Factiva; International Crisis Group; Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners; Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State

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