

July 24, 1990

ETHIOPIA

"Mengistu has Decided to Burn Us like Wood"

Bombing of Civilians and Civilian Targets by the Air Force

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Massawa, April 22.

Two small boys sit under a fence, both are wounded and bleeding, watching the aftermath of the air raid -- people being dug out of the rubble, the dead being buried. The older one, his head bandaged, is screaming, from both pain and bewilderment, but falls silent for a moment. The younger boy touches him on the shoulder. "Are they going to bury us too?" he asks. "No, no," his brother reassures him, "we might get taken to the hospital."^{*}

Introduction

The Ethiopian air force is currently engaged in a bombing campaign which is largely targeting civilians, and which is resulting in the killing and maiming of thousands of non-combatants, including many women and children. This bombing campaign cannot be regarded as "indiscriminate": for the pattern of attacks suggests that there is a specific aim of killing civilians believed to be sympathetic to rebel movements, disrupting their economic life, preventing food relief from reaching them, wreaking revenge for defeats by the rebel armies, and instilling fear. The government of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam has used the air force to fight civilians for more than a decade; however, the bombing campaigns launched since 1988 have been unprecedented in their scope.

Since February, the Eritrean port of Massawa, described by the Ethiopian Tourist Office as "The Pearl of the Red Sea", has been a particular target for bombardment. The raids started a few days after the capture of the port by the forces of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), and continued intermittently until June. Most of these attacks have not been aimed at targets of military significance, but instead at the installations of the port, the food relief stored there, and most appallingly, the civilian population. Over one hundred civilians have died in Massawa due to air raids.

Massawa is not the only example of mass murder from the air in contemporary Ethiopia, nor is it the worst. This newsletter, concentrating only on the period since the start of 1988, refers to massacres elsewhere in Eritrea, and in the provinces of Tigray, Wollo, Shewa, Gondar, and Wollega. Deadly air raids are a daily occurrence. The massacre of over 1000 civilians in the Tigrayan market town of Hausien in June 1988, was a particularly brutal example of this policy of terror and destruction. Other major towns, such as Meqelle, the capital of Tigray province, have also been attacked. While current government policies persist, Massawa is unlikely to be the last example of such a massacre.

^{*} Quoted in *Dispatches: Fight to the Death*, a film made by Daniele Lacourte of Alter-Cine Inc, and shown on British television, Channel 4, June 20, 1990. (Hereafter referred to as *Dispatches*).

One particularly important effect of the bombing is the disruption of commerce. Markets and all forms of transport are particular targets for the air force. As a result, all commerce in rebel-held and contested areas takes place at night. This has seriously depressed the economies of these regions, and aggravated greatly the problem of famine. The air force also attacks food relief moving from Sudan.

Colonel Mengistu commands over 100 bomber aircraft, including sophisticated MiG 23s, supplied by the Soviet Union. He has a formidable array of weaponry including phosphorous and/or napalm, and cluster bombs. Phosphorous and napalm are deadly weapons which burn the flesh with a fire that is almost impossible to put out. A cluster bomb is designed to explode in the air, blasting a lethal shower of smaller bombs over a wide area. The cluster bombs used by the Ethiopians are almost certainly supplied by Israel.

The greatest fear among Eritreans is for Asmara. The city of Asmara, capital of Eritrea, is almost the only part of Eritrea that remains in government hands. It is surrounded by the forces of the EPLF. There are an estimated 400,000 civilians in Asmara. Should the city, or part of it, fall into the hands of the EPLF, the residents will be vulnerable to air attack. The fact that the Ethiopian government has been ready to attack major towns and cities in rebel hands, such as Meqelle and Massawa, and the fact that it is capable of organizing the systematic destruction of an entire town, such as Hausien, should leave little doubt about its readiness and capacity to destroy all or part of Asmara. If Colonel Mengistu decided on such an act, the consequences would be truly horrendous in terms of human suffering and death.

NB -- Sources of Information

In the circumstances of the wars in Ethiopia, it is almost impossible to gather information except as the guest of one of the warring parties. The Ethiopian government does not permit foreign nationals, especially journalists, to travel to contested areas. This report therefore relies heavily on information provided by visitors to rebel-held areas, who have travelled as guests of the rebel forces. We make particular use of a film of Massawa shot by a Canadian film company, who visited rebel-held Eritrea earlier this year. The film-makers were allowed to interview civilians freely, and the filmed testimonies of the interviewees were independently translated. The translations were also independently checked by Africa Watch. Africa Watch has relied on independent sources for information concerning raids and the number of casualties. We have also recorded in some instances the claims made by the rebel fronts with regard to figures for casualties, and have made it clear that this information comes from the rebel fronts.

The Destruction of Massawa

On the evening of Sunday, April 22, the Ethiopian air force raided Massawa. At 10:30 a.m., an earlier raid had occurred. This attack produced no casualties, because after more than two months of intermittent bombardment, the people of Massawa had by now become used to daytime raids, and so spent the daylight hours in air raid shelters -- in storm drains, under bridges, and in the cellars of houses. The second attack occurred at 6:15 p.m., at dusk. This was after the last hour when attacks normally occur, as the bomber pilots leave themselves enough time to return to base before nightfall. The residents of Massawa had therefore left their shelters, and were in the streets on their way to church, market, or work place. One woman described how she was making *kicha* (unleavened bread) for the feast of *Medhanie Alem* (The Saviour's Day, a monthly Christian religious feast), with her family when the bombs exploded. Another man was sitting with his family; only he and his sister in law survived. One woman, sheltering with her family in a drain under a road, described her situation:

The plane bombed us. The people are suffering ... entire families were wiped out -- not a single person left alive in the family. We did not come here [to the drain] to have a good time. We didn't come here for fun. We're having a bad time.
Mengistu has decided to burn us like wood.*

Two cluster bombs exploded over a crowded street in the center of the town. About 50 people were killed and 110 wounded, many of them very severely, bringing the number of fatalities due to the raids to over 100.

Video recordings taken immediately after the bombing confirm that the casualties were civilians. One video, shot after the raid, contains pictures considered too horrific to be shown on public television: one shows the body of a woman with her face entirely burned away, another shows a dead child with a hole in his face. Other pictures, marginally less horrific, include a close-up shot of a pile of bodies lying in the street, their flesh punctured with fragments from cluster bombs, and pictures of survivors with large areas of skin burned away; in some cases the raw flesh covering the entire back.**

Massawa is a town with clearly separated docks, commercial and residential quarters, and the town itself lies some distance away from the military installations. The bombers flew low, at a height of a few hundred feet. They deliberately targeted the residential areas of the town, and attacked at an hour calculated to cause the maximum number of casualties among civilians.

* *Dispatches*.

** These were shown as part of the *Dispatches* film.

Destroying "The Pearl of the Red Sea"

The EPLF are fighting the government of Colonel Mengistu. They describe themselves as fighting for Eritrean national self-determination, the government describes them as separatists. On February 8 the EPLF launched an attack on Ethiopia's second port, Massawa, which they captured on February 11. About 200 civilians were estimated to have been killed in the fighting, but the port was essentially intact, and required few repairs before it could function again. Since that date, the Ethiopian government has pursued a policy intended to reduce Massawa to rubble: to turn the "Pearl of the Red Sea" into a mere piece of grit.

The first air raids occurred on February 16. For eight days there were repeated attacks. The initial targets appeared to be the food stores, which contained about 50,000 metric tons of US-donated wheat, for famine relief. About half of this food relief was burned. Susan Watkins, an official of Oxfam Canada, who visited Massawa at the time, saw two warehouses and three stockpiles of grain burning, and commented "it was clear that food aid was the target of the bombardment."^{*}

Killing Civilians

This first wave of attacks used napalm or phosphorous bombs. These were dropped on the food aid, to make it burn. They were also dropped on an area just outside the town where civilians who had fled the fighting were sheltering. At least 25 civilians were burned by these bombs. One victim of this raid described, in English, what occurred:

When we got out from Massawa we were under the trees. We are just civil peoples. The aeroplanes have seen us [that] we are civil peoples. They came at nine o'clock ... They bombed bombs and napalm bombs. They have bombarded us for two hours.^{**}

These attacks also used cluster bombs. Cluster bombs are a particularly deadly munition, as they explode before striking the ground and shower a large number of smaller bombs, each one lethal, over a large area. They are designed to kill large numbers of people. Their military use is against columns of infantry. Dr. Assefaw Tekeste a public health officer, commented:

In this town -- only civilians live in this town. The fighters are fifty kilometers from this town. There is no point in bombarding this town unless you want to kill

^{*} Quoted in *The Times*, London, March 3, 1990.

^{**} *Dispatches*.

children and women.*

Independent witnesses have confirmed that by the time the air force bombed Massawa with cluster bombs, the town was almost clear of EPLF military personnel, reinforcing the belief that the use of these weapons must have been designed to kill civilians.

Preventing the Port Re-opening

March was somewhat quieter in Massawa, and in mid March the EPLF announced that the port was ready for re-opening. Yemane Yohannes, a senior technician in the port, told a visiting journalist "if a ship arrives tomorrow, we can handle it."** He said that four diesel-powered cranes, three berths, four warehouses, and three tugs were still functional, so that relief shipments could be unloaded. This appeal for relief shipments met with only one positive response, from the German-based relief organization Cap Anamur. Cap Anamur chartered the Danish-flagged ship Danika 4, loaded it with 1000 metric tons of food relief at Bremen, and set sail for Massawa.

On April 4, the Ethiopian government began another series of sustained attacks on Massawa. 30 people were killed and 54 seriously wounded. In three raids over the following four days, another 41 people died. Then on April 22, the devastating attack using cluster bombs occurred.

This series of raids also used demolition bombs, and did severe damage to warehouses and other port installations, as well as destroying more than 100 houses. By this time, several offensives by the Ethiopian army aimed at retaking Massawa had failed, and it is probable that the bombing raids were now intended to destroy the port entirely. A woman resident of Massawa, Fatna Ari, commented "whenever Mengistu realizes that he is defeated he kills people with aeroplanes."***

By the end of April, the relief ship chartered by Cap Anamur was nearing Massawa. On May 1, the Ethiopian government threatened to bomb the ship should it attempt to dock at Massawa. Despite diplomatic pressure from western governments, the Ethiopians did not relent, and the ship was diverted to Port Sudan.

On June 3, the question of famine in Ethiopia was raised at the Washington summit. Under pressure from the super-powers, the Ethiopian government conceded that Massawa could be used for relief deliveries. However, before this was officially announced on June 5, another air raid took place. Raids in the Massawa area continued until June 10. An EPLF spokesman responded: "the port facilities have been virtually destroyed by air raids ... I don't think Massawa could

* Dispatches.

** Quoted in *The Guardian*, March 16, 1990.

*** Dispatches.

operate as a port for many months."* Since early June, there have been no air attacks on Massawa. At the time of writing, the port is almost ready to handle substantial food shipments.

Government Denials

The Ethiopian government has denied deliberately killing civilians in Massawa. Questioned about his poor human rights record in general, Colonel Mengistu has gone so far as to say "it is not in my nature to kill even an insect or a small living thing, let alone a human being."** The reaction of Dr. Wolde Gaber, an Eritrean physician treating the wounded from the Massawa attacks was: "I have heard on the radio that they deny [the bombings]. Whether you laugh or cry I don't know."***

In spite of these denials, Africa Watch believes that the Ethiopian government ordered repeated bombing raids, deliberately aimed against civilians in Massawa. These raids were intended to destroy food relief to prevent it being eaten by people sympathetic to the EPLF, to destroy the port installations, and to terrorize and kill civilian non-combatants as a reprisal for the EPLF's military successes.

Not an Isolated Incident

Bombardment is carried out in waves. At the time of writing, there is a lull in the bombing of Massawa, partly on account of international pressure over the opening of the port for food relief. However, bombing continues elsewhere. There is little reason for optimism. The air force remains, the munitions remain, and the political leadership that ordered these massacres of civilians remains in power.

The repeated raids on Massawa are only the most recent and most publicized of a long-standing strategy of attacking civilian targets. These attacks have occurred principally in the rebellious north, in Eritrea and Tigray, but have also occurred in other parts of Ethiopia.

* Quoted in *The Guardian*, June 7, 1990.

** Interview with Carson Black, *The Times*, London, June 28, 1990.

*** *Dispatches*.

The Ethiopian Air Force

Ethiopia's rugged and mountainous terrain makes travel by air the easiest way to reach many parts of the country. By the same token, air attack is the easiest way to mount military offensives, counter-insurgency operations, and to carry out reprisals. When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935, aeroplanes were critical to his success. In 1943, the *weyene* rebellion in Tigray was put down by the newly-restored Emperor Haile Selassie only with the assistance of British Blenheim bombers based in Aden. Haile Selassie also used military aircraft to suppress peasant revolts against taxation and changes in land rights, notably in Gojjam in 1968, and also used the air force in Eritrea. In 1952, Haile Selassie signed a 25-year military cooperation pact with the USA, which allowed US use of the Kagnew air force base near Asmara, in return for US military assistance to Ethiopia. Until the agreement expired in 1977, the Ethiopian air force consisted mostly of US-made aircraft, such as F5 fighter-bombers, and most of the pilots were trained in the USA.

In 1977, a putsch by Colonel Mengistu, leader of the pro-Soviet faction within the revolutionary military government (known as the *Dergue*) coincided with the expiration of the military agreement with the USA, and President Carter's reluctance to continue military assistance on account of the appalling human rights record of the *Dergue*.

Colonel Mengistu turned to the USSR for military assistance in 1977, and built up a formidable air force. Recent figures indicate that it includes 143 combat aircraft.* This consists of 121 MiG fighter-bombers (including 23 of the sophisticated MiG 23 BNs), 13 Antonov transport/bomber aircraft, and 22 helicopter gun ships. Pilots have been trained in the USSR. Since that date, Colonel Mengistu has opted for a military solution to almost every problem that has confronted him, and has made unprecedented use of the air force, flying daily sorties over various parts of the country, especially EPLF-occupied Eritrea.

In March 1988, the EPLF inflicted a major defeat on government forces at Afabet. This was followed up by major advances by both the EPLF and the rebel forces in neighboring Tigray, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Immediately thereafter the most intensive bombing campaigns to date were launched. On May 14, 1988 the government declared a State of Emergency in Eritrea and Tigray. One of the provisions was the designation of a strip of land 10 kilometers wide, along the coast and the Sudanese border, as a "prohibited area", effectively making it a free-fire zone for the army and air force. The State of Emergency remains in force at the time of writing.

The Ethiopian air force has shown discontent with Colonel Mengistu. Senior members of the air force were prominent in the attempted coup of May 1989, and since then pilots and their planes

* International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-1990*.

have defected to Yemen and Sudan at frequent intervals. However, this reluctance to support the government has not prevented the air force from perpetrating regular atrocities.

There is no balance of weaponry in the air. The rebel forces have no aircraft. In April 1988 the TPLF captured an ageing Ethiopian Airlines DC3 on the airstrip at Axum. The plane had only one operational engine and was in no state to fly. Nevertheless it was repeatedly attacked by MiGs, which sprayed it with cannon fire and bombed it, so that it became burned out. The rebels possess some anti-aircraft guns, captured from the Ethiopian army, and occasionally succeed in shooting down a bomber.

Objectives of Air Raids

Air raids against civilian targets have several objectives. These include destroying property and killing people, disrupting production and trade, terrorizing and demoralizing people, deterring rebel forces from capturing towns for fear that they would be destroyed, and taking revenge for defeats.

Major Bezabih Petros, a pilot who was trained at both Williams Air Force Base, Arizona, and Ligov Air Base in the USSR, was shot down and captured by the EPLF in April 1984. In captivity, he had this to say about the bombing:

We definitely know civilians will get hurt. But, knowing that the people sympathize with the rebels, the order is to bomb everything that moves.

Disrupting Production

One objective of bombing raids is the disruption of production in rebellious areas. Bomber aeroplanes frequently fly over rebel-held territory and attack the productive base of rural life. Peasant farmers in Tigray have reported being bombed while they plowed their fields, and refugees from western Eritrea living in Sudan reported losing livestock to bombing raids. They said that the pilots of MiGs appeared to take particular pleasure in "hunting" camels. Such raids are harmful not merely because of the damage they cause, but because they force civilians to pursue their economic activities at night, when they are safe from these raids. This has an obvious effect on the economic prosperity of the areas in question.

Bombing "Everything that Moves"

In intensive bombing campaigns, such as those against the EPLF-occupied areas of the Sahel region of Eritrea throughout the 1980s, in central Tigray and western Eritrea in mid-1988, and in Eritrea and Wollo recently, the air force will attack anything that moves. Not only is it impossible to move by vehicle during daylight hours, but camel and mule trains, and columns of

people are also liable to be attacked.

The fighting of mid-1988 in Eritrea displaced over 100,000 civilians. About 40,000 fled to Sudan, and Africa Watch has obtained testimonies from some of these refugees. They described how it was not safe to inhabit a village during daylight hours, so people instead spent the day hiding in the hills, returning home only at dusk. They could not wear bright clothing for fear of attracting the planes, and had to hang their washing to dry in the shade of trees. They could not light a fire to cook, because the smoke would give away their presence. Travel to Sudan was possible only at night.

Attacks on the Towns as a "Soft" Target

Towns are an easier target than rural areas. Towns that have been captured by the EPLF and the TPLF are perhaps the most common target of raids. The Eritrean town of Nacfa has been completely destroyed by ten years of repeated air raids, and many other towns have also suffered.

The following is a list of some of the air raids on major towns which have been reported since 1988. It has been compiled from the claims of the rebel fronts, where they have been substantiated by independent evidence, and from other independent reports. The list is far from exhaustive. Air raids are so frequent and unremarkable that the great majority are never reported, even if there are casualties.

1988

March-June: 9 attacks on Hausien, Tigray (casualties not known).

March: Abi Adi, Tigray, helicopter attack, 48 killed or wounded.

April: repeated attacks on Afabet, Eritrea (casualties not known).

April: Agordat, Eritrea, at least 3 killed.

April: Anseba, Eritrea, 2 killed.

April 8: Wukro, Tigray, about 100 killed.

April 13: Wukro, Tigray, 31 killed.

April 29-30: Wukro, Tigray, 25 killed.

May 3: Wukro, Tigray, 20 killed.

May 7-8: Mensura, Eritrea, 5 killed.

May 13: Halhal, Eritrea (one of a series of attacks. At least 3 killed).

May: Adigrat, Tigray, casualties not known.

May 19: Afabet, Eritrea, 10 killed.

June 10: Lego, Eritrea, no fatalities reported.

June 22: Hausien, Tigray, over 1000 killed (see below).

June 22: Abi Adi, Tigray, 1 killed.

September: a series of attacks in Barka region, Eritrea (casualties not known).

October: Agordat, Eritrea (casualties not known).

October: two Sudanese locust-spraying planes attacked inside Sudan.
November: two raids on Sudanese border villages, Red Sea Province.
December 12: Sheraro, Tigray, 8 killed.

1989

March 21: Enda Selassie, Tigray, 1 killed.
March 26: Humera, Tigray (casualties not known).
March 26: Adwa, Tigray (casualties not known).
March 27: Adwa, Tigray (a rare example of a night attack).
March 30: Axum, Tigray, 3 killed.
September: Tekezze Bridge, Tigray, 3 killed.
September 9: Chercher, Tigray, 148 killed, over 100 wounded.
September 9: Gobye, Wollo, 1 killed.
September 10: Gobye, Wollo, 21 killed, 100 wounded (market day).
September 12: Gerarsa, Tigray, 4 wounded.
September 19: Raya, Wollo, no fatalities reported.
September 20: Kulmelsk, Tigray, 3 killed.
September 22: Axum, Tigray, 2 killed.
October 27: Meqelle, Tigray, 31 killed.
October 29: Meqelle, Tigray, no fatalities reported.
November 5: Adwa, Tigray, no fatalities reported.
November 13: Kara Mishig, Shewa, 1 killed.
November 15: Tenta, Wollo, no fatalities reported.
November 15: Zalembesa, Tigray, no fatalities reported.
November 16: Degollo, Wollo-Shewa border, no fatalities reported.
November 16-17: Woldiya, Wollo, no fatalities reported.

1990

January 4: Tenta, Wollo, 2 killed.
January 10: Wurgessa, Wollo (casualties not known).
January 13: Nefas Maucha, Gondar, 23 killed.
January 23: Deha, Wollo, 7 killed.
January 28: Isitayoh, Wollo, 40 killed (most of them in the church of Kidane Mehrat).
January 29: Wegel Tena, Wollo, 2 killed.
February-June: repeated attacks on Massawa, over 100 killed.
March 28: Wire Ilu, Wollo, grain stockpile burned.
April 3: Afabet, Eritrea, 16 killed.
April 4: Afabet, Eritrea, 51 killed, 125 seriously wounded.
April 13: Koro, Eritrea, 1 killed.

May 2: Rama, Wollo-Shewa border, 2 killed.
May 2: Alem Ketena, Shewa, 4 killed.
May: Merhabete, Shewa, casualties not known.
May 5-9: Kolesh and Ambat, Shewa, 6 killed.
May 21: Afabet, Eritrea, 2 killed.
June 10: Ticha, Shewa, 23 killed.
June 23: Adi Abun, near Adwa, Tigray, 1 wounded.

In 1988 and 1989 the bombing was mostly confined to Tigray and Eritrea, but has since moved south into Wollo and Shewa, after the advance into these provinces by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of rebel forces led by the TPLF.

There have been air attacks against military targets. However, those reported above were specifically against civilian targets. After witnessing the attack on Afabet on May 19 1988, Dr. Rupert Neudeck of the German organization Cap Anamur commented:

What hurts me most, I can tell as an eye-witness testimony, is that in this town there was no military target. What was done by the Ethiopian MiGs was only to hurt and to murder peasants, civilians, nothing else.

Destroying Economic Life: The Campaign Against the Markets

Most of these are market towns, and many of the raids occurred on market day. Almost every market in Eritrea and Tigray, even those in small villages, shows signs of aerial bombardment.

The campaign against the market towns has a particularly damaging economic effect. Markets are crucial for the economic life of both towns and rural areas. This is particularly the case in times of food shortage, when farmers whose harvests have failed need to attend markets to buy grain from elsewhere. Almost all markets in rebel-controlled Eritrea and Tigray have been held at night since 1988. The markets are thus smaller than normal, and it is harder to do business. They are lit by candles and small gas lamps, and people and animals stumble around in the near-darkness, unable to see the goods properly. The resulting depression in trade has driven many small merchants out of business, and deprived farmers of consumer goods and staple grains.

Attacks on Food Relief

There are humanitarian organizations associated with both EPLF and TPLF, the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) respectively. These organizations, with the assistance of international relief agencies, provide food and other assistance to the civilian populations in areas controlled by the rebel fronts. These deliveries of relief have been another target of aerial bombardment. The bombing of the food stores at Massawa and the threat to blow up the Danika IV were not isolated incidents.

Relief convoys moving from Sudan are often attacked. The convoys move by night and hide under trees by day, but are still vulnerable. Following the summer drought of 1989, and the resulting stepped-up relief activities, in December the air force began a series of attacks along the routes used by the convoys of ERA. This practice continues at the time of writing. In January 1990, foreign journalists travelling on a relief convoy organized by REST found themselves under fire. Mary Anne Fitzgerald was among this group:

The first sign of the impending raid on our convoy came on the morning of January 29, when two MiGs bombed the nearby town of Serrano^{*}, a depot for food supplies. It is now under such constant attack that most of its inhabitants live in underground shelters and shop in the market under cover of darkness.

In the afternoon the jets switched their attack to our 11 lorries. They could have spotted us by the tell-tale glint of a wing mirror through the camouflage netting and branches. The MiGs attacked with cluster and phosphorous bombs, scattering us over the arid terrain ... After a brief lull, we were bombed again. Villagers, many of whom had come to help the wounded, scattered as the earth was chewed up by cannon fire and bombs.^{**}

Three lorries were destroyed, four tons of food burned, one local herder killed, and a driver and a cook injured. Lorries belonging to ERA were burned in January and on two occasions in March.

Distribution centers run by ERA and REST have also been bombed. The marketplace at Chilla, one of REST's main locations for distributing famine relief, was pitted with five huge craters from aerial bombardment in November 1988.

The Ethiopian authorities have defended their actions by claiming that the ERA and REST convoys bring in military supplies to the rebel fronts, and that the food is destined for the fighters. These claims have been contested by independent monitors from international voluntary agencies.

The air force has also bombed the Red Cross. One attack, which occurred in April 1988 at Wukro, Tigray, clearly shows that the government's intention was to kill civilians and to halt relief deliveries. Wukro was held by the government until March 1988, and was a center for relief distributions by the Ethiopian Red Cross. After the TPLF captured the town, the Ethiopian Red Cross distributions continued according to the schedule already agreed with the government.

^{*} Sic, in fact probably Sheraro.

^{**} The Sunday Times, London, February 18, 1990.

On April 8, the distribution went ahead as planned, but government bombers attacked and killed about 100 civilians who had gathered there. The government "explanation" that those killed were rebel fighters is wholly false.

In late 1989 the government agreed to allow the Ethiopian churches to run a relief operation that transported food across the battle lines to distribute to drought-stricken people in rebel-held Tigray and Wollo. The churches' relief convoys have moved in safety, but this agreement has not prevented continued bombing of the relief program mounted cross-border from Sudan.

Instilling Fear

An important element in the government's bombing strategy is instilling fear in the civilian populations. The bombing, and the measures needed to cope with it, such as living by night, pose enormous practical problems and are demoralizing for the civilian population. An Eritrean refugee woman in Sudan explained why she had left her country: "I was tired. I wanted just to walk outside in daylight without needing to look into the sky and fear for my life and my children." It is not even necessary for the aircraft to drop bombs in order to inspire fear. They need only screech overhead at unpredictable intervals to remind people of their deadly presence, and the need for constant vigilance.

In addition, one or two attacks appear to have been planned specifically to demoralize the civilian population. The majority of the people of highland Tigray and Eritrea are Orthodox Christians, and for them, the town of Axum is a particularly holy place. The ancient church of St. Mary of Zion is famous as a site of pilgrimage and as a cultural relic of great importance to Ethiopian history. On March 30, 1989, it was bombed by the Ethiopian air force, damaging the priceless wall paintings, icons, and other antiquities inside. Three people were also killed in the raid. The partial destruction of the church is unlikely to have been an accident: it is located apart from the main section of the town, adjacent to a museum, another church, and the famous stelae or obelisks of Axum.

The two attacks on Meqelle in October 1989 were also important. Meqelle is the capital of Tigray province, and these raids indicated that the Ethiopian government was willing to destroy even its major cities should they fall into rebel hands. Unlike Massawa, Meqelle was evacuated by the government in February 1989, and was occupied by the TPLF without a fight.

A recent attack occurred at Adi Abun, just outside Adwa, on June 23, 1990. People had gathered in the church of Abune Teklehaimanot to commemorate the second anniversary of the bombing of Hausien, and remember the people who were killed. There was a 40-minute raid by MiGs, the church was damaged, and one small girl was wounded.

Even those not physically wounded have been left with permanent psychological scars after

bombardment. The survivors of air raids have described being distraught with grief, delirious with fear for days or even weeks, subject to sudden-onset panic attacks which leave them in a state of acute anxiety, or prone to ever-present fears during the daytime and nightmares during the darkness. Some children become frozen with terror at the mere sound of an aeroplane.

Bombing in Wollega

Air raids are not confined to northern Ethiopia. Wollega province, in the west of the country, is the scene of fighting between the government and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). In January 1990, the OLF launched its largest military campaign to date, and briefly captured the town of Asosa. The government responded in predictable style. According to OLF claims, mostly substantiated by independent sources, the following air raids occurred:

January 7-8: Asosa, 9 killed, 15 wounded, including women and children.

January 10: Asosa, 10 killed, 5 wounded.

January 15: Bambasi, north of Asosa. (For this and the following raids, no casualty figures are available).

January 23: Mandi, north of Asosa.

January 23: Dalatti, north of Asosa.

January 26: Bambasi.

January 27: Hophia, north of Asosa.

February 7: Hurungu, many houses burned.

February 8: Arge, many cattle killed.

February 8: Buldugilin, north of Asosa, many houses burned.

Air Raids in Government-Controlled Ethiopia

While rebel-controlled areas have borne the brunt of the campaign of bombing, the government has not hesitated to bomb people in parts of the country where rebel movements are not active, if these people are reluctant to comply with government policies.

For example, local resistance to government policies in Manz, northern Shewa, was met with bombing attacks in 1981. Similarly, the program of forcing peasants to abandon their homesteads and live in centralized villages was implemented in Gojjam in 1986 only with the assistance of helicopter gun ships.

Munitions Used in Bombing

Napalm

The alleged use of napalm by the Ethiopian air force has become the subject of controversy. There have been accusations that the Ethiopian government has used napalm since the 1970s. Such accusations are extremely difficult to prove, because other munitions cause similar injuries. Phosphorous in particular is even more devastating than napalm, because the burning is more difficult to put out. Water has no effect, and the phosphorous will continue to burn through to the bone. To the victims, the question of whether they have been burned by napalm or phosphorous is somewhat academic.

A mission to rebel-held Tigray by a British medical team in 1988 discovered evidence of the use of napalm-like weapons.* Four patients were suffering from burns. One, Tabey Kidane, aged 19, described what happened to him: "I was guarding my cattle near Edaga Habret when burning material came from the sky, burning the trees and the grass and killing one of my cows." When examined by Dr. Eric Charles ten months later, his burns were still suppurating. The doctor described the wounds: "their burns were deep and were a chemical type of burn ... they kept erupting and wouldn't heal."

Similar wounds were inflicted during the bombings of Hausien (see below) and Massawa, and have been reported in other parts of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government has consistently denied using napalm.**

Cluster Bombs

Various types of cluster bombs have been used by the Ethiopian air force for several years. Conclusive evidence is provided by the descriptions of the manner in which the bombs explode, and the types of wounds which are inflicted. Cluster bombs were used in the bombing of Hausien and Wukro, and elsewhere in Tigray. This year, for the first time, they have also been used in Eritrea. A physician, Dr. Andom Ogba Mariam, described the origins of the wounds he treats on civilians:

There are burn cases -- napalm -- and in the area of Afabet, there was cluster bomb, which explodes in the air, and which has an extensive blast which covers a wide area, and there was damage to buildings and all sorts of things around it.

* Dr Eric Charles, "Emergency Health Care Team Report," November 1988.

** Letter to *The Sunday Times*, London, November 20, 1988.

This is for sure the cluster bomb -- we haven't seen it before.***

Members of the Ethiopian air force who have been captured by the rebel fronts or who have defected to Yemen have confirmed the use of cluster bombs against civilian targets.

Soviet Supplies

Most of the munitions used by the Ethiopian air force have been supplied by the USSR, which has been a close military ally since 1977. With *glasnost* and the recent moves towards global detente, the USSR has put pressure on the Ethiopian government to seek a negotiated settlement to the several wars ravaging the country, and has indicated that the present arms supply agreement, which expires in 1991, will not be renewed. Unfortunately, optimism that Soviet arms supplies have already ceased is premature. During 1990 several shipments of Soviet arms have arrived in Ethiopia, and more are due. The large size of the current Soviet arms agreement means that even in the era of *glasnost*, many innocent civilians can still be killed and wounded by Mengistu's 100-plus operational fighter-bombers.

The Israeli Connection

There is increasing evidence that the government of Israel is supplying lethal weaponry to the Ethiopian air force, and possibly training and advising it as well.

On December 10, 1989, the *Sunday Times* of London reported that Israel was secretly supplying cluster bombs to Ethiopia. This followed a remark by President Jimmy Carter, who said that he feared US cluster-bomb technology was being exported by "one of our middle east allies" and used by a certain third world country. While both countries remained unnamed, it soon became clear that the countries referred to were Israel and Ethiopia. Israel originally received cluster bomb technology from the USA. The export of munitions developed with US technology is illegal under US law, but Israel claims that it has since developed its own cluster bomb, and therefore that the US-imposed restrictions do not apply.

Following two years of gradually warming relations between the two countries, Israel resumed diplomatic relations with Ethiopia in November 1989. The delivery of cluster bombs was allegedly part of a deal in which Ethiopia would allow 15,000 *Falashas* (Ethiopian Jews) to migrate to Israel. In an implicit confirmation of the countries he indeed meant, Jimmy Carter commented to Israeli Knesset member Dedi Zucker, "You don't need to sell Mengistu fragmentation bombs in order to persuade him to let your people go."*

*** *Dispatches*.

* Quoted in *Return*, April/May 1990.

There have been allegations throughout the 1980s of an Israel-Ethiopia arms flow, either supplied free or sold, but these new accusations have much greater authority. They were repeated in the *New York Times* on January 21, 1990, when US government officials were quoted as having "strongly suspected" that Israel was the source of cluster bombs used by the Ethiopian air force. A confidential congressional staff report, written in February and leaked to the *Washington Jewish Weekly*^{*}, confirmed that in 1989 Israel supplied Ethiopia with about 100 cluster bombs, and that delivery of a much larger number was postponed for fear of incurring the wrath of the US government. The report also indicated that Israel was probably supplying other technical support for the air force, as well as military advisors.

The Ethiopian and Israeli governments have both denied the delivery of cluster bombs, or the existence of a military pact between the countries, though the Israeli ambassador to Addis Ababa, Meir Joffe, has admitted the presence of some advisors and a supply of small arms.^{**} Africa Watch cannot say with absolute certainty that Israel is supplying cluster bombs to Ethiopia. However the evidence for such a supply is now so considerable that simple denial by the Israeli government is not adequate. Africa Watch believes that supplying cluster bombs to Ethiopia actively abets consistent and gross abuses of human rights, and Africa Watch calls upon the Israeli government to cease the supply of these deadly weapons to Ethiopia.

Chemical Weapons

There have been allegations that Ethiopia has stockpiled chemical weapons, and in 1982 there were allegations of their use in Eritrea. Such allegations are extremely difficult to prove, and Africa Watch has no evidence that the Ethiopian government either possesses or intends to use chemical weapons. However, in its current ruthless desperation, it is possible that the Ethiopian government would consider using such weapons.

Africa Watch has obtained the testimony of Zahra Ibrahim, an Eritrean woman in Wad Sherifei refugee camp in Sudan, which points towards the use of gas -- but not necessarily to internationally-banned chemical weapons. Zahra, who was from Halhal, recounted how the Ethiopian government attacked the Halhal front in May 1988, using both aerial and artillery bombardment. During this military engagement they used a gas which made the eyes sting, made the skin painful, and brought on a terrible thirst. This probably indicates the use of CS gas or tear gas, such as is commonly used in riot control. While not internationally-banned, such gas can be dangerous. Driven from her home by the fighting, Zahra wandered for three days in the hills, and

^{*} July 12, 1990.

^{**} *Washington Jewish Weekly*, July 12, 1990, and in an interview with Richard Dowden on British TV Channel 4, *The World this Week*, June 2, 1990.

during this time one of her young children died from the combined effects of thirst, exposure, and the gas.

Chemical weapons were used by the Italians during the invasion of 1935, and have since been regarded with particular horror and revulsion by Ethiopians. This is a factor that has undoubtedly inhibited their use by the government.

Hausien, June 22, 1988

The air raid on Hausien on Wednesday, June 22, 1988, was one of the most savage on record. Hausien was a market town in north-eastern Tigray. The market attracted people from all parts of the province, and from as far away as Eritrea and Gondar. On a normal market day the town was packed with several thousand people, coming to trade in animals, grain, salt, coffee, and other commodities. Though Hausien was attacked eight times in mid 1988, the residents did not consider themselves to be at serious risk from air attack, because the area was not controlled by the TPLF, and most of the market-goers came from areas controlled by the government. Unlike the practice in TPLF-controlled areas, the weekly Wednesday market therefore continued to be held during daylight hours.

The destruction of Hausien will be described in some detail because, although it occurred two years ago, it illustrates the capacity for systematic destruction of civilian targets by the present Ethiopian government.

The following account is reconstructed from the interviews conducted by two visitors to Tigray, Sarah Vaughan and Gerry McCann.* Though the interviews were conducted in November 1988, the memory of the atrocity remained fresh in peoples' minds.

The bombing started in the late morning and continued until nightfall, following a carefully coordinated plan.

Blata Aragabi, a 57-year old farmer recounts the day:

It was Wednesday, and I was in the market square. At about 10 o'clock in the morning two helicopters came low overhead and circled for about an hour. An hour later they came back with two MiGs. They circled for a while and then bombed the market area, which was packed with people, and animals waiting to be sold. Apart from the market square itself, there was also a big animal market

* They are reproduced in Sarah Vaughan, "Extracts from a Report on a Visit to Tigray, October 18 - December 13, 1988," (London, War on Want), and Gerry McCann, "Between Heaven and Hell," Observer Scotland, April 16, 1989.

in the old school compound. The MiGs concentrated on the markets: no-one could have stayed alive in those areas. Meanwhile the two helicopters circled round trapping people as they tried to escape, cutting them down like leaves. [Hausien is in a valley and there are only two roads out of the town, so it is easy to seal off with just two helicopters].

[The bombing] started at 11 in the morning and went on until about 4 p.m. [at this point another man said it was later -- 5.30 p.m. -- and Blata agreed]^{*}; almost until it got dark. Each time the MiGs and the helicopters had finished bombing they went away, and more kept coming, two by two. I don't know how many times new planes came; because of all the dust it was dark and people were crying all around me. It seemed to be about every half hour or so that they would leave, and there would be a few minutes interval. People would come out of where they were trying to shelter and pick up the bodies thinking it was all over. Then the planes would return.

The bombers used high explosives and cluster bombs; the helicopters used machine guns and rockets. Survivors were particularly disturbed by the "burning liquid" which fell from the aeroplanes, presumably napalm or phosphorous.

"A", a priest, aged 41:

It was so dark, the smoke hung over the town as if it were night. People were crying, confused, and hysterical. There was something that fell from the sky, like rubber, but it burned your flesh.... There was a lot of blood in the market place. So many animals were killed by being burned or poisoned. I don't know what the poison was but it was something that burned them. Those of us who were left wouldn't even eat the carcasses, or have them near our houses.

Blata again:

[In the market] most of the people and cattle were being burned by something that seemed like rubber. It burned as it dropped off the sky, and didn't cut like metal does.

A cluster bomb remained unexploded in the schoolyard after the raid and was photographed by Gerry McCann. It was unfortunately impossible to ascertain its origin.

Most people sheltered in houses, but the bombers turned on these too, using high explosives.

** Other informants said that the bombing finished at 6 p.m.*

When the day finished, there was scarcely a building left standing.

Iquar Gebre Giorgis, a woman beer-seller:

I was selling *sewa* (local beer) in my house. Market day is always a good day for selling beer, and there were about 20-30 people in the house. I had my 13 year old daughter Negisti with me. When the bombing started we thought the safest thing would be to stay inside. They only seemed to be bombing the immediate area of the market. Soon, though, they started on the houses, and mine was hit. The roof on my house was not the usual tin, but wooden with heavy beams. The whole roof caved in, and the walls came down too. There was one woman who escaped being buried. She was crying and digging at the rubble, and she managed to dig out a man who had been buried up to his neck. Eventually the two of them dug me out, though I was buried from noon until 3 o'clock. We were the only three who survived from my house. Negisti died along with everyone else. Some of them we managed to dig out that evening were still conscious, but they died soon after. They were all farmers or traders, some from Hausien, some from the villages around. I knew most of them quite well; I can remember about half of them by name.

Haile Geresadie, a poor farmer aged 18:

[The bombing] started in the morning, and I was at the animal market with my parents and grandparents. The animal market was full of people and donkeys, but we ran as quickly as we could into the nearest house. The house was bombed, and out of about 20 people there were only three of us [who] survived. We were on the side furthest from where the bomb landed. My parents and grandparents were all killed. [The others] were just farmers and traders who ran in from the animal market. Some of them are still buried there.

Zimam Hamenur, a woman spice trader:

All six of my family were in our house when it started, and we stayed there all day. After several hours a bomb came through the window and hit my daughter Fatima. Everyone else was unhurt but her right hand was cut off. Even then we stayed in the house -- we were too frightened to go out, and we just sat and cried round my daughter.

The Number Killed: "You Can't Count Grains of Sand"

After nightfall when the bombers had left, people contemplated the aftermath. The true number killed in the bombing will never be known. At first the TPLF claimed that 360 were killed, and

500 buildings destroyed, including 9 stores, 15 shops, and a mosque. Later estimates by the TPLF were higher: 600 fatalities, then 750, finally an "official" figure of 1300. Africa Watch believes that these figures are all underestimates. Most of the people attending the market in Hausien came from other places, so there was no list of the people present on June 22, and many of the dead and injured were quickly removed to their home villages. Some bodies remained buried in the rubble of buildings months later. According to the testimonies of the people of Hausien, the number of fatalities was as high as 1800 or even 2000.

Blata again, in response to the question of how many were killed:

You can't count grains of sand. Even now, six months later,^{*} we are still finding bodies. The last one was on Friday week: we found the head of a man and buried it. I heard from the [TPLF] fighters that thousands were killed, and a Dergue ^{**} [government] radio broadcast said that they had killed 3000 bandits at Hausien. We buried between 100 and 200 in the churchyard, but there were also lots of bits of bodies -- heads and limbs -- and people took many of the corpses back to be buried in their own villages. ... People came here from different parts of the country, from Eritrea, from Wollo, for the market day.

Priests are responsible for burying the Christian dead, and so have a better idea than most people about the extent of the carnage. From priests "A" and "B":

As soon as the MiGs went away everybody started to work together to dig the bodies out of the rubble and bury the dead. We buried as many as we could immediately that night. The task of digging through the stones went on for over a month... [Asked: how many bodies do you think are still buried?] We could estimate the number that were found, but have no idea about those who were not. They came from Sheraro and from all over the region. In every *tabia* [village cluster] or village you go to in this area you will hear that 40, 60 or 80 people were killed. Those from farther afield are harder to count.

Priest A:

I think about 1800 were killed in total, when you include those who were taken back to their villages. There were probably another 1000 wounded, and some of them may have died later. We buried 150 just in this churchyard, but many were

^{*} The interview was conducted on 20 November, which was in fact just under five months after the bombing.

^{**} No government broadcast concerning Hausien was published by the BBC Monitoring Service, so Africa Watch has been unable to check this.

too badly cut up for burial, or are buried just where they died. There were many priests killed, from Eritrea, Tembien, Adwa, even from Wollo. Sometimes as many as 10,000 people gather here for market day. No one can count the destruction of cattle and grain and money and all the property that was buried.

Not all bodies could be buried, or even identified. Haile again:

I couldn't bury [my family members] because they were burned away to ash. There was only one body that could be brought out [of the bombed house, in which about 17 people died], and even that woman was very badly burned.

Kesi Gebre Hiwet, a farmer and priest aged 54, came to Hausien the night after the attack. He spent the night digging people out of the ruins, and estimated the casualties at 2000 dead and 800 wounded.

We found so many corpses, we went on digging until morning. Whilst we were digging we found dismembered hands and feet, but couldn't find the bodies they came from. In the morning we started to bury the dead and brought the wounded away. Four of those whom we brought back to this *tabia* died after two days.

Medical facilities are poor and many of the wounded died later. There are reports that some injured victims were denied admission to government hospitals.

The bombing was not limited to Hausien on June 22. A number of villages within a half hour's walk or so were also attacked on the same day, and the marketplace in the nearby town of Abi Adi was attacked by helicopter gun ships, killing one woman.

A Heinous War Crime

The evidence of eye witnesses suggests that a minimum of 1000 innocent men, women and children were deliberately killed in Hausien by aerial bombardment. Many others were severely injured and maimed, or psychologically traumatized. Apart from the scale of the carnage, what makes Hausien a particularly brutal atrocity is the systematic nature of the attack. It required careful planning to arrange for a succession of MiGs and helicopters to be present at Hausien, far away from the nearest airfield, in coordinated shifts throughout an entire day. Visitors to the ruined market town have commented that, in the tragic catalogue of Guernica, Coventry, Dresden, and Hiroshima, a place also belongs to Hausien.

The motive for bombing Hausien is not clear. The market town had no military significance, and many of the people were not even from rebel-controlled areas. It is most likely that the raid was an act of terrorism against the people of Tigray, in part revenge for the military successes of the TPLF over the previous months, and in part "softening them up" for the government offensive

through nearby areas, which occurred the following week.* Hausien was probably selected as a target because, not being in a rebel-controlled area, the market still met during daylight, and there were no TPLF fighters in the area with anti-aircraft artillery to make an attack dangerous.

When public allegations were first made about the atrocity at Hausien, in the *Sunday Times* of London, the Ethiopian embassy in London strenuously denied them: "Your article alleging the use of lethal weapons by Ethiopia against the civilian population was groundless."^{*} How ever strong the denials of diplomats, unfortunately for the people of Ethiopia there is ample evidence that their government is bombing its own citizens, day in and day out, with a callous disregard for human life.

Lack of International Pressure

International pressure brought the issue of famine in Ethiopia onto the agenda of the Washington Summit in June 1990, and the combined pressure of Presidents Bush and Gorbachev succeeded in compelling Mengistu to consent to allow Massawa to be opened up for food relief. This has prevented subsequent air attacks on Massawa. Earlier in the year, international pressure also forced the Ethiopian government to give permission for the Joint Relief Program (JRP) of the Ethiopian churches to transport food across the battle lines to distribute to drought-stricken people in rebel-held Tigray. This has prevented air attacks on the JRP distribution centers. Both these initiatives have shown that the Ethiopian government is susceptible to international pressure.

However, there has as yet been no international pressure on the issue of the bombing *per se*. The Ethiopian air force has continued to attack civilian targets -- including the relief lorries, food dumps, and distribution centers of ERA and REST -- without public denunciations from major donors.

Dr. Wolde Gaber, an Eritrean physician, deplores the lack of international pressure over the issue of bombing. "World opinion is not doing much about it. When it happens somewhere else, it is a name and a surname. Here in Africa we are only figures."^{**} Unfortunately, the figures are mounting. Thousands -- perhaps tens of thousands -- of innocent civilians have been killed or maimed by the deliberate actions of the Ethiopian air force.

* The army "purged" the nearby towns of Abi Adi and Wukro of "terrorist bandits" on 24 and 25 June respectively, according to Addis Ababa Radio. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts*, ME 0188, June 27.

* Dr Teshome Teklu, Embassy of Ethiopia, in a letter to *The Sunday Times*, November 20, 1988.

** *Dispatches*.

Fatna Ari, a woman from Massawa, has the same complaint: "America is the biggest in the world. King of them all. America hasn't told Mengistu: 'Go and fight with guns, artillery, trucks, if you want. But don't use planes to destroy the earth.' ... They see, but they keep silent."^{***}

Fatna's regrets apply with equal or greater force to the countries of the European Community, which are Ethiopia's largest aid donors. Above all they apply to the USSR and Israel, who are its major military suppliers.

Recommendations for Action

Africa Watch condemns the Ethiopian government's policy of bombing civilian targets, which is leading to repeated massacres of civilians. Africa Watch also condemns the supply of armaments by the USSR and Israel to the Ethiopian government for use in such raids.

Please express your opposition to the Ethiopian government's policy of bombing civilian targets, and urge the authorities to put an immediate end to these bombing raids. In particular, oppose the use of cluster bombs, napalm and phosphorous.

Please also express your opposition to the supply of lethal weaponry to the Ethiopian air force by the governments of the USSR and Israel, and urge these governments to cease supplying the Ethiopian air force with the means to bomb civilians and civilian targets.

Please address appeals to:

**His Excellency Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam
Head of State and Commander-in-Chief
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia**

**His Excellency Mr. Teferi Haile Selassie
Ambassador
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17 Princes' Gate
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**His Excellency Mr. Girma Amare
Charge d'Affaires
Embassy of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
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Washington DC, 20008**

**His Excellency Mr. Leonid M. Zamyatin
Ambassador
Embassy of the USSR
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^{***} *Dispatches.*

**His Excellency Mr. Yuriy V. Dubinin
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Africa Watch is a non-governmental organization created in May 1988 to monitor human rights practices in Africa and to promote respect for internationally recognized standards. Its Executive Director is Rakiya Omaar; its Research Director is Richard Carver; Janet Fleischman and Karen Sorensen are Research Associates, and Ben Penglase and Jo Graham are Associates.

Africa Watch is part of Human Rights Watch, an organization that also comprises Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch. The Chairman of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein and the Vice-Chairman is Adrian DeWind. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, the Deputy Director is Kenneth Roth, Holly Burkhalter is Washington Director, Susan Osnos is Press Director and Joyce Mends-Cole is Counsel to Human Rights Watch.

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