

**ROSEANNE PEREIRA:** [? Berhanu ?] [? Abebe ?] sits alone at a table with his laptop. Behind him towers a massive whiteboard crammed with writings in black marker. Every square inch seems to have another fact, the percentages of the different ethnic groups in Ethiopia, words like cell phone, to remind him to mention the government's restrictions on text messaging.

The board is like a map of [? Abebe's ?] mind. It's overflowing with vital information about the Oromo and their sometimes violent troubles with the Ethiopian government.

**SPEAKER 2:** The regime is following a kind of ethnic apartheid policy, which is very difficult probably to understand in the United States, because the politics here is more along racial lines, Black and white. But in Ethiopia, we don't have racial line divisions, but there are ethnic divisions.

**ROSEANNE PEREIRA:** The Oromo make up 40% of Ethiopia's estimated 77 million people. The ruling party of Ethiopia, on the other hand, is made up of people of a different ethnicity, the Tigray. They make up about 7% of the country's population.

Human rights reports gathered by the US State Department document Ethiopian government sponsored human rights abuses of the Oromo and other groups. [? Abebe ?] is a former Ethiopian diplomat. For years, he worked at the UN advocating for closer ties between Ethiopia and the United States. But now that the two countries are allies in the war on terror, he fears that the Ethiopian government is getting a free ride on human rights abuses.

**SPEAKER 2:** They charge people with high crimes like genocide, treason, and sometimes terrorism, because that word sounds good and feels good for the Western listeners.

**ROSEANNE PEREIRA:** Michele Garnett McKenzie directs Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights Refugee and Immigrant Program. She's worked with many Ethiopians, including the Oromo, since the early '90s. She says though ethnic conflict has been going on for over 100 years in Ethiopia, she's noticing a new trend from the Ethiopian government.

**MICHELE GARNETT MCKENZIE:** Moving beyond simple political repression into a much more subtle way to disenfranchise the entire community, limiting people's ability to go to school, not allowing Oromo people to go into secondary school-- to cut the knees off of the intellectual class of Oromo living in Ethiopia.

**ROSEANNE PEREIRA:** According to [? Berhanu ?] [? Abebe, ?] there are two separate education systems in Ethiopia. People of ethnicities favored by the government go to better schools and on to college, leading to good jobs and leadership positions. If you're Oromo, he says, it's difficult to get beyond the 10th grade. And the government regularly expels Oromo students from the university.

**SPEAKER 2:** In this way, they are trying to build the exact replica of the apartheid system in South Africa or the separate but equal system that was once used in the United States vis-a-vis the African-Americans.

**SPEAKER 4:** My day will not be right if I don't wake up and check what happened. I have to check my emails. I have to check the news. What's happening? Maybe my family might be killed.

**ROSEANNE PEREIRA:** University of Minnesota student, [? Dami ?] [? Orma, ?] got kicked out of school in Ethiopia. Now he's studying political science. Imagine, he says, what it's like to get kicked out of school.

**SPEAKER 4:** Somebody like me who had traveled two hours, three hours to go to school, who did not have basic necessities when I went to school, and only to go to college and get dismissed.

**ROSEANNE PEREIRA:** [? Orma ?] says there are few options for Oromo students who remain in Ethiopia after being dismissed from the university. Some returned to the farms they were trying to escape through education. Others, he said, are now homeless.

[? Ropsani ?] [? Aitana ?] is the executive director of the Oromo American Citizens' Council. His office in Saint Paul is bare, except for a painting hanging on the wall. Thin grass in the foreground stands before a mountain rising behind. [? Aitana ?] says it reminds him of the Ethiopian landscape. It's calm and relaxing. He says, though, the reality for the Oromo in Minnesota is often riddled with insecurity.

**SPEAKER 5:** They're depressed. They feel guilty because most of the family here, but nothing they can do about it. They cannot really live there. They fear for their life too.

**ROSEANNE PEREIRA:** [? Ropsani ?] [? Aitana ?] is one of the many Oromo trying to raise awareness, but it's not easy. They live in fear that if they speak out against the Ethiopian regime, family members will be hurt back in Ethiopia.

A study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* examined the Twin City's Somali and Oromo refugee populations. It found that 69% of Oromo males studied had experienced torture.

Now many Oromo are tracking a piece of legislation going through the US Congress. The bill would encourage respect for human rights and democracy in Ethiopia. Roseanne Pereira, *Minnesota Public Radio News*, Minneapolis.