Introduction

Ethiopia, the most populous land locked country in the world, is situated in northeastern Africa, bordered by Eritrea to the North, Djibouti and Somalia to the East, Sudan and South Sudan to the West and Kenya to the South. Amidst high temperatures and arid conditions, Ethiopia is also subjected to torrential rain and imminent floods that aggravate the already tumultuous state of this region. Ruled by an array of dynasties such as the Zagwe Dynasty and Aussa Sultanate in its early years, and in the late 1900s by a Soviet-backed communist state known as the People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ethiopia is now politically controlled by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) led by their Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, whose ruling status was recently renewed by an overwhelming majority in the general elections, as announced in May 2015. The refugee problem however, stemmed from the Somali Invasion during the “Red Terror”, a communist campaign in 1977 that eventually amounted to the loss of a few hundred thousand people; and the war with Eritrea in 1999 where several Ethiopians, Somalis and Eritreans were rendered homeless, resulting in social tensions and several cases of human rights violations.

As of the UNHCR August 2014 report, Ethiopia has overtaken Kenya in having the most number of refugees in Africa with a former count of 629,000 refugees prevalent within all its territories. This toll is estimated to rise above 800,000 by December 2015, and such exponential growth can be attributed to the various conflicts present in Ethiopia’s neighboring regions such as the civil war in Somalia and the political mutiny in South Sudan. Eritrea has also contributed to the refugee toll mainly as a consequence of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War. The Ethiopian Government maintains an open-door policy towards the deluge of incoming refugees, however, the practicality of this policy has become questionable as native Ethiopian citizens face not only food and water shortages, but also fear losing their employment and future job opportunities. As part of the rehabilitation process, refugee camps have been set up in the Ethiopian provinces of Assosa, Dollo Ado, Gambella, Jijiga, Semera, Tigray, Addis Ababa, Afar and Shire. Nonetheless the rising refugee count threatens the peace, security and sustainability of the inhabited areas.

On a political front, the flaws and shortcomings of Ethiopia’s refugee law provision, the National Refugee Proclamation of 2004 are evident, as there are not enough provisions for the naturalization of the refugees into the social structure. Moreover, the inhibition of cooperative efforts in the Charities and
Societies Proclamation (2009) enacted by the parliament causes major drawbacks in the positive progression of this refugee stricken state. On the other hand, the EPRDF’s efforts at providing employment and economic opportunities, physical safeguarding and basic services is notable, given the sheer amount of refugees prevalent. The EPRDF is also supportive of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its main government counterpart, Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) in coordination with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) are constantly providing humanitarian aid at the various refugee camps in accordance with the EPRDF’s regulations. Refugee Task Forces deployed are responsible for effective coordination, and the World Food Program (WFP) will renew the Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation. In terms of financial aid, for 2015, an ExCom (Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme) approved budget of USD 206.9 million is to be allocated, which is suspected to fall short, in light of the escalating refugee numbers. However, with recent allegations on the World Bank for human rights violations during its supervised ‘villagization’ project, the safety of refugees is put into serious question, as funds are suspected to be used to consolidate power of ruling by the EPRDF.

Additionally, human trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation as well as sanitary and health issues such as the spread of Hepatitis E, are added problems that plague Ethiopia’s attempts at maintaining political, social and environmental stability.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Refugee**¹

Any person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, due to fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former residence as a result of such events, is unable or unwilling to return to it.

**Open-Door Policy**²

An Ethiopian policy which means in quintessence that, ‘all refugees, who fit the definition above, shall not be prohibited from seeking refuge in the host nation, as long as they comply with the law of that state.’

**Villagization**³

The EPRDF initiative to concentrate the population in a community village as opposed to scattered settlements.

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¹ Refugee definition adapted from 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
Promoting Basic Services (PBS) 4

This endeavor, whose goals are to provide refugees with basic life sustaining resources as well as education and a source of livelihood, is funded by the World Bank, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the African Development Bank and several other donors.

Out of Camp Policy 5

An Ethiopian policy that enables refugees who have stayed at the refugee camp for a minimum of 6 months and can demonstrate their ability to sustain themselves without the assistance from the government of Ethiopia or the UNHCR, granted no criminal record, are allowed to leave the camps and reside elsewhere in the country. However this benefit is currently in the favor of only Eritrean or refugee university students.

Background Information

As aforementioned, the crux of the issue lies in the Ethiopian history, consisting of political turmoil mingled with territorial disputes and a harsh climate, that has led to the formation of a somewhat fragmented society, consisting of a large number of refugees, wherein breeds severe social tension.

Obstructions in the effective management of refugees

The primary sources of the refugee influx belong to some of Ethiopia’s neighboring nations as well as other African nations, which are involved in conflict. However, Ethiopia over the years, has been unable to manage the growing refugee numbers, as they hold true to their “open-door policy”. The following events have 2been the key hurdles that contributed to the refugee crisis.

Shifts of power and ongoing conflicts

Ethiopia, along with Somalia and Eritrea, were once Italian colonies, known together as the Italian East Africa. After the subsequent dictatorship under that Marxist Colonel Mengitsu and an invasion by Somalia, Ethiopia fell under the leadership of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, who divided Ethiopia into ethnically based regions. However, as Ethiopia gained the slightest of political and administrative stability, the Ethiopian-Eritrean border dispute in 1999 erupted into a full-fledged war, causing several more refugees to cross borders on both sides. Internal tensions and protests regarding elections rendered Ethiopia’s political situation into complete turmoil, and the count of human rights violations increased. Subsequently, tensions with Eritrea began to build again over border disputes and people continued to flee from conflict zones. The recent political turmoil in South Sudan has caused a sizable population of South Sudanese refugees to seek shelter in Ethiopia, as they now dominate the total refugee count. All

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2 Open-Door Policy as interpreted from the UNHCR periodic review for Ethiopia, 2011
3 Villagization as interpreted from Ethiopia’s rehabilitation plan for indigenous people and refugees
4 Promoting Basic Services as interpreted from Ethiopian government publications
5 Out of Camp Policy as interpreted from the UNHCR periodic review for Ethiopia 2011
these events have mounted to the increase in the influx of refugees who seek Ethiopian shelter, in hope of survival.

**Inadequacies and controversy**

Ethiopia has not been the most politically stable of countries, as public opinion believes that each political party has acted to their own interests and avoided most of the very real problems that the people of the nation are facing. Arbitrary arrests, rape and torture allegations were made on the military forces by the Human Rights Watch, concerning the Anuak people of the Gambella region. However, these charges were promptly denied. After protests during elections and bombings in Addis Ababa, no political organization took responsibility, and Ethiopia was thrown into disarray. Furthermore, in February 2014, leaked audio transcripts were uncovered by US based human rights group ‘Inclusive Development International’ alleging human rights violations such as torture, arbitrary arrests and sexual assault on the World Bank-funded projects for the rehabilitation of people, including a large amount of refugees in the Gambella region of Ethiopia. These allegations were initially brought up in a report submitted to the World Bank by their Inspection Panel; however, the World Bank denies having any knowledge of the violations committed during the Promoting Basic Services (PBS) project, a joint venture of the EPRDF and the World Bank, also funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) and the African Development Bank. Diversion of funds was also present in the report, which signifies the extent of corruption present in the money-transfer schemes. Lack of laws put into place regarding the rights of refugees, as well as lack of cooperation with non-government organizations have caused major fallbacks in the process of aiding the refugees within Ethiopia or rehabilitating them into the Ethiopian society.

**Unfavorable climate and health problems**

Located in the sub-Saharan region with high temperatures and arid conditions, Ethiopia also faces floods and abounding rain, testing its resilience year after year. Refugee camps, lacking in sanitation and durability, become home to many epidemics of malaria and cholera. Moreover, the physical destruction of shelters causes a large monetary loss. Reports in the Ethiopian camps confirm a large outbreak of Hepatitis E. from the South Sudanese refugees, increasing the death toll. Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome are areas of concern for the Ethiopian Government, due to high illiteracy present among the refugees.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**Ethiopia**

According to UNHCR reports in January 2015, over 720,000 refugees were accounted for in the various camps across Ethiopia, and joint efforts between the EPRDF and various international organizations could cover the humanitarian and financial burden of the refugees. Many have criticized
Ethiopia’s open-door policy, and this policy does not seem viable in the near future, given the increase in the refugee influx. Furthermore, basic services such as food and water provided in the Promoting Basic Services (PBS) project have been inadequate during droughts, making starvation another problem and causing a greater need for financial resources to import food. Employment opportunities for refugees are limited to the informal or primary sector and there are no concrete methods put into motion for their rehabilitation into the Ethiopian society. Funds are expected to fall short towards the end of 2015, as Ethiopia continues to deal with overpopulation at the refugee camps. Reports of alleged human rights violations by armed Ethiopian military forces are confirmed by the UNHCR; however, most of the evidence stems from questionable witness accounts at the camps, that are scrutinized for being ‘falsely fabricated’ by the military. At such a juncture one must question the limit to Ethiopia’s open-door policy and how it shall affect the sustainability of the state with continued strain on its resources.

**Somalia**

As of January 2015, there were 254,680 refugees in Ethiopia originating from Somalia, present mainly in the Dollo Ado and Jijiga camps due to either the 1991 fall of the Somali government and the subsequent civil war, or the growing periods of droughts and famines that compelled their departure from a state drowned in poverty and war. However, as the situation in Somalia has been showing gradual improvement, the incoming refugee rate, as seen in late 2014, is on the decline, which is a positive sign nonetheless. Somalia are also developing a national legal framework for refugees along with UNHCR’s return consortium consisting of UN agencies and international NGO’s as there is a sporadic return of people to their originating areas that are now relatively stable. Somalia is still facing civil tensions with the presence of the Al-Shabaab, although the growing political stability should be followed by a possible discussion on the return of more Somalis from other nations, especially Ethiopia.

**South Sudan**

As of May 2015, there are over 200,000 South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, since the civil war began in December 2013, most of whom are in the Gambella region. The refugees consist mainly of women, children and elders, most of whom do not have adequate resources to sustain themselves and are also subject to shortages of food and water at the refugee camps in Gambella. The internal strike, coupled with famine, has motivated many to seek refuge in neighboring countries, out of which the majority has fled to Ethiopia. Common belief lies in the bitter truth that South Sudan is currently not in any position to allow refugees to return even though they have not made any official statement regarding the refugee scenario, granted the current security issues and food shortages faced nationwide. As the political status of South Sudan is in mutiny, it is only expected that Ethiopia and other countries shall receive several thousand more refugees in the near future.

**Eritrea**

As of January 2015, there were about 106,670 refugees in Ethiopia originating from Eritrea, of which most migrated as a consequence of the 1999 war, in search for a conflict free life. The border disputes between Eritrea and Ethiopia have been prevalent since the Italians decolonized Africa and
Eritrea formerly became a province of Ethiopia. Eventually in 1999 the Ethiopian-Eritrean war broke out, and many Eritreans got displaced into Ethiopia, seeking refuge within the nation, in Afar and Shire in the Tigray region. A large part of the refugees were minors, and hence, were victims to human trafficking, that is a common practice in the region. Smuggling and trafficking now seems the epitome of Eritrea’s refugee situation as it has become imperative for them to work with Ethiopia to provide safeguarding and protection to the refugees in Ethiopia or the ones in transit whom may be future victims of the aforementioned.

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

The UNHCR’s work in aiding the refugees in Ethiopia has been commended by the global community. The UNHCR has contributed to 25% of the fees for students within the refugee community to attend university, and has worked with the EPRDF to provide out-of-camp schemes to provide livelihood to those living in the refugee camps. Education and health are the leading objectives for the UNHCR, as they continue to provide basic services and have extended their services to a special care service for minors, to ensure that children are not abused or subject to trafficking. However, there are still few cases of sexual abuse, trafficking and torture that arise on occasion. The UNHCR works in coordination with the UNICEF, EPRDF, WFP and the Humanitarian County Team in Ethiopia. Their most recent work in late 2014, in accordance with the World Health Organization (WHO), included reducing the spread of Hepatitis E. among the South Sudanese refugees.

**World Bank**

The World Bank has been regularly funding the refugee camps all around Ethiopia, as well as providing funds for the various rehabilitation and employment schemes, in accordance with the EPRDF. Within the Promoting Basic Services (PBS) plan, the World Bank has also allegedly been backing the government’s ‘villagization’ venture, which goes against their bank policy of violating the rights of indigenous people. Moreover, there was no risk analysis or adequate measures to exterminate the concurrent rollout of the villagization project. After their Inspection Panel raised these allegations, the World Bank promptly denied them, and went forth to devise an Action Plan that was criticized by the Human Rights Watch as it ‘merely reinforced its problematic current course’. The Action Plan promotes a series of methods to mobilize communities to engage in local government decisions. However, they don’t take into account the high percentage of risk that the people take in. It was also revealed that, in the Gambella region, as part of the villagization project, people (including refugees) were forced to move into the government-made villages with the use of force.

**United Nations Children’s Fund**

The United Nations Children’s Fund has been providing humanitarian assistance to refugees in Ethiopia, with notable work for Somali refugees in 2011. Their Emergency Education Programme has stimulated the creation of 120 school tents providing refugee children with basic education and skills, which shall enable them to apply for jobs in the future. Their critical health services have been successful
immediate measures to soften the impact of casualties and they have also provided drugs and medication for the Hepatitis E breakout.

**Timeline of Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Italy invades Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>15th September, 1952</td>
<td>United Nations federates Eritrea with Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th November, 1969</td>
<td>Ethiopia acceded the 1951 refugee convention and its 1967 Protocol</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Somalia invades the Ogaden region in Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>Severe famine causes thousands to forcibly relocate from Eritrea and Tigre</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th April, 1988</td>
<td>Somalia and Ethiopia sign a peace treaty</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Ethiopian-Eritrean war begins</td>
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<tr>
<td>April, 2002</td>
<td>Ethiopia and Eritrea accept a new common border</td>
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<tr>
<td>January-February, 2004</td>
<td>About 200 people killed in ethnic clashes in the Gambella region, Tens of thousands flee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15th June, 2004</td>
<td>Refugee Proclamation is made</td>
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<tr>
<td>May, 2005</td>
<td>Disputed elections lead to severe protests</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Series of foods kills hundreds, thousands rendered homeless</td>
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<tr>
<td>May, 2010</td>
<td>EPRDF wins elections, however protests still continue</td>
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<tr>
<td>July, 2011</td>
<td>Major droughts affect Ethiopians and Somali refugees require emergency attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February, 2014</td>
<td>Inspection Panel reports Human Rights Violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August, 2014</td>
<td>UN declares Ethiopia as the highest refugee hosting African nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May, 2015</td>
<td>EPRDF wins elections again and renews their ruling power</td>
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**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

- WFP/EB.2/2008/8-B/3 Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, World Food Program; 8th October, 2008

**Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**
The UNHCR, in association with Ethiopia's ARRA, have been assisting and providing shelter to the refugees, including makeshift homes, access to food and water, providing sources of livelihood and education. However, with the increasing number of refugees, Ethiopia will not have adequate infrastructure and resources to support them, even with the assistance of other international organizations. This has caused Ethiopia to reconsider their open-door policy as it is not feasible for them to continue to host the influx of refugees considering they are having starvation problems in many of their districts. Community building schemes and education projects have been drafted and implemented; however, corruption and social tensions have been inhibiting their progression. Ethiopia’s out of camp policy has been quite beneficial in terms of providing Eritrean refugees with exit grants; however, this policy has it shortcomings, the most important of which is that this policy is not extended to refugees belonging to a nationality other than Eritrean. However if this policy were to be made equal and offered to all refugees, then it would heavily decrease the burden for resources faced by Ethiopia and other associated organizations. Even though secure care facilities are provided to minors, the trafficking and smuggling of refugees are on the rise. Trafficking, smuggling and sexual exploitation incidents mainly stem from the lack of social integration of refugees within the Ethiopian society, making them more vulnerable to such occurrences. Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), a French-founded, international organization, has distributed over 80,000 bars of soap donated by UNICEF throughout the camps, to promote hygiene and prevent the further spread of Hepatitis E. The Refugee Task Force acts as an effective forum for organizations to coordinate the donation and distribution of the various forms of aid, and keep track of the progress of rehabilitation. Improvisations in the current Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation include the new cash-for-food project, along with a larger use of biometrics and security procedures. All the current methods of aid are short-term. However, as the asylum space in Ethiopia decreases, it is time to look at resettlement, integration into society or relocation of refugee camps to manage the growth in numbers of the incoming refugees.

Possible Solutions

In terms of immediate action, the solutions already put into motion do include providing the refugees with adequate life sustaining resources. However, there is no long-term goal put into motion that can keep up with the increasing refugee count.

At a primary level, the current aid distribution methods are quite time-consuming, and the involvement of many different organizations makes the process of giving out aid quite complicated, hence reducing the effectiveness of its action. An existing or new central body could be given the role of collecting, recording, distributing, and monitoring the aid distributed by the Ethiopian government, instead of having different organizations at various points trying to coordinate and transfer the aid securely. Also, a central body reduces the chances of any diversion of funds and the aid being subjected to corruption at any stage. More stable economically, politically and socially stable countries in the neighboring regions could be encouraged to welcome refugees and work to set up temporary housing options through the means of economic development incentive in terms of tax increment financing and employment in city projects to improve the infrastructure of the host state. Private firms can also be encouraged to outsource labor by means of providing employment opportunities to the refugees in
Ethiopia, providing more financial stability and autonomy to the latter. Education schemes should be made compulsory, to educate the refugees through the means of cooperation with non-governmental organizations, for which Ethiopia should be urged to consider revising their 2009 parliamentary law. The EPRDF should also hold meetings per quartet, in order to discuss increasing the human rights provisions within the national legislation under a framework that is to be proposed by the new central body. The Refugee Task Forces should also extend their mandate, to the end which shall enable them to investigate cases of trafficking, sexual assault and torture, as well as appeal to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to call upon the UNPKF, in case of a widespread assault on the refugees. The recent allegations on the World Bank should also be investigated further into and the Refugee Task Forces should look into all complaints regarding human rights violations, to ensure the refugees are given their basic rights.

Within the scope of long-term solutions, Ethiopia can provide extensive rehabilitation schemes by methods for the categorization and segregation of refugees, to the end that they may receive the best-suited environment and can facilitate their way into society with ease. They should also be given the option of applying for Ethiopian citizenship and engaging in microfinance projects or entrepreneurship promoted by the local government that shall benefit them and the economy. Refugees who seek to return to their homeland should be provided with a provision for temporary citizenship, so that they may exercise the right to equality, and access to courts, in light of the recent human rights violations. Upon the success of the education schemes, especially with refugees whose return to their native region may not be viable for the foreseeable future, migration to developing countries in need of labor shall allow the refugees to acquire a better lifestyle and soften the strain on Ethiopia, only if they themselves wish to.

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**Appendix or Appendices**


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