

Query response

Ethiopia: The prison «Jail Ogaden»

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Introduction

This query response answers specific questions about the prison *Jail Ogaden*, located in Jijiga in the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia (Somali Region).¹

The information presented is primarily obtained from a local source Landinfo met with during a fact finding mission to Ethiopia in November 2014, during which Landinfo also visited Jijiga. The source represents a local organization. Landinfo considers the source to be both reliable and to have good knowledge of the prison. The source wishes to remain anonymous for reasons pertaining to future work and private security.

The prison's location

Construction of Jail Ogaden started in 2000, and the prison was in use by 2002 (Karamarda 2014).

Using the website Wikimapia that conveys satellite images with high resolution, Landinfo notes that the prison is located some three kilometers north-east of the center of the regional capital Jijiga. There are scattered settlements around the prison. The main access road to the prison runs from the south along the wall towards the east, and it is not paved. Jijiga University is located about one kilometer east of the prison (Wikimapia).

¹ Region 5 is one of the states of the Ethiopian federation. The region is also called Somali Region or Ogaden. This report uses the term Region 5.

Description of the prison

Karamarda Group has published a sketch of the prison's basic structure which shows a rectangular shape (Karamarda 2014). However, it is somewhat misleading. Using the website Wikimapia, Landinfo found that in reality, the basic structure of the outer wall is almost square with the dimensions of approximately 130 x 140 m (Wikimapia).

A local source stated that the outer wall is built in grey brick and has barbed wire on top.

The main entrance to the prison is located at approximately the center of the wall facing north.

Using the website Wikimapia, Landinfo observed that the prison also has an inner wall which divides the prison complex into an inner and outer zone. The inner zone has a rectangular shape. Towards the south, the distance between the inner and outer wall is approximately 30 m. The distance between the two walls from east to west is approximately 15 m. On the north side, the inner wall does not measure like the rest of the walls since there are a number of buildings up against the inner wall on the north side. However, where visible, and where the gates of the inner zone are located, the distance to the outer wall is approximately 40 m (Wikimapia).

All the buildings, both in the inner and outer zones, have only one floor, according to the local source. The prison has 22 cells or prison blocks where up to several hundred inmates sit together. Regarding the question of whether there are underground rooms in the facility, the same source explained that he was not completely certain, but thought that there were no such rooms.

Inside the outer wall facing west, large pictures of the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles, and the current president of Somali Region, Abdi Mohamed Omar (known as Abdi Iley), are displayed.

The current head of the prison is called Nur Abdi, who also belongs to the special police Liyu Police.²

About the prison population

The local source reported that there are about 10,000 prisoners in the jail and that about 3,000 of them are women.³

The female inmates are held in two of the 22 prison blocks and both of these are located in the outer zone.

Detainees are locked up most of the day and have limited opportunities to be outdoors.⁴

Two prison blocks have stricter regimes than others. They are the prison blocks numbered 8 and 3 and are located towards south in the inner zone. These departments hold, among others, people receiving disciplinary punishment in the prison.

² See separate query response of 3 June 2016 from Landinfo about Liyu Police.

³ Reported figures for the number of prisoners are uncertain. Other sources state between 3,000 and 13,000. Landinfo has not succeeded in obtaining information on this issue that we consider reliable.

⁴ It was not possible to get any closer clarification on this point by the local source.

Among the inmates, there are former leaders/managers of the prison. These include Abdi Bede Osman, who was dismissed in 2012, Jamal Dheere, who was the leader/manager up to May 2013, and Jamal Dheere's successor Aynasane Sheikh Mohamed. These prisoners are imprisoned along with other prominent prisoners in their own quarters, which are located in the two corners on the north side of the outer zone. Above the quarters/ houses where they are held, there are platforms upon which there are guard towers. Such guard towers are located in every corner of the outer wall.

Most of those who die during their stay in prison are buried by their family outside of the prison. But those who for various reasons are not brought out are buried within the prison walls. Such burials take place near the northern part of the outer wall facing west.

The prison management

The current head of the prison is Nur Abdi, who is also called Ilka'ase. He is also part of Liyu Police (local source, conversation in November 2014).

Opportunities to Escape

A few years ago (before the Liyu Police took control of the prison), some prisoners managed to escape from the prison. When Liyu Police took over in 2009, the outer wall was built higher and barbed wire was put on top of the wall. It is therefore now considered very difficult, if not impossible, to escape from the prison. Today, to get out other than by regular release, one must pay bribes (local source, conversation in November 2014).

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Country of origin information presented in Landinfo's Query responses does not contain policy recommendations nor does it reflect official Norwegian views.

References

Written sources

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Oral sources

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