

Eight Ethiopians poisoned to death in UAE

Sunday 19 July 2009

By Tesfa-alem Tekle

July 18, 2009 (ADDIS ABABA) – Addis Ababa has begun a probe after eight Ethiopian house-maids were reported to have been murdered under mysterious circumstances in their apartment last week in Sharjah, the third largest emirate of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a source from Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated.

Ethiopian authorities have contacted Ethiopia's consulate general in Dubai for details in the incident. But UAE police has declined to comment or provide details to the Ethiopian authorities for a reason that "case still under investigation."

As off-hand for facts at this moment, an Ethiopian official who requested anonymity told Sudan Tribune that Ethiopian authorities are following up the incident seriously and government will reveal details early next week.

According to sources from the Ethiopian embassy in the UAE, the eight female maids had been poisoned by a compatriot maid last Wednesday. But the motive behind the killings remains unclear.

The murder case was reported to the police on July 8 and later referred to forensics. While investigations are under way, arrests have been made, but an exact number could not be ascertained.

The women are said to have been living together in an apartment in the Abu Shagara neighborhood.

The UAE has received extensive criticism over the years from human rights and labor organizations over the conditions for foreign workers in the country.

Domestic workers, which make up a significant proportion of the UAE's predominately foreign population, have complained of sub-standard housing, lack of medical care, abuse and non-payment of wages.

The International Labor Organization plans to push international standards or labor recommendations for domestic laborers in their annual conference next year.

The United States recently placed the country on a watch list of countries with poor human trafficking records.

Thousands of young Ethiopian women are being enticed via Djibouti, Egypt and Somalia for domestic work, to the Middle East particularly to the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon with the promises of lucrative work but except few lucky ones, most of them suffer worst verbal, physical and sexual abuses.

Most girls are employed in back-breaking jobs for up to 18 hours a day. Many Ethiopians have ended up killed by their employees, or commit suicide and many more return home mentally ill, partially paralyzed, insane, with broken backs and legs and others been burned with acid.

Following the rise in deaths of a number of Ethiopian domestic workers, the Ethiopian government in May last year banned its citizens from attempting economic travel to Lebanon. The ban remains in effect.

During the past few years, the Ethiopian government have scaled up preventive steps such as issuing proclamation for agencies to have a permit from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and also a massive awareness campaign by the Ethiopian media, but the numbers flocking to the Middle East are still huge and seems to cost the government relentless efforts nationwide.

(ST)