

Africa (Anglophone)

Alemtsehay, Ethiopia

Alemtsehay, 16, lives in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. She was born in a village called Kambo near Fiche Town, the main town of the North Shoa Zone of Oromia Regional State. Alemtsehay moved to Addis Ababa ten years ago after her father's death with a female relative of her father. Her father's relative promised to take care of Alemtsehay and send her to school. Alemtsehay's mother, three brothers and three sisters stayed on their farm in Kambo.



Alemtsehay (right), 16, Ethiopia at Children's World Congress on Child Labor and Education, New Delhi, India, September 4-8, 2005

Upon arrival in Addis Ababa, rather than taking care of Alemtsehay, her relative made Alemtsehay work without pay as a child domestic worker. She lived and worked with this lady for three years. She worked 12 hours a day, every day of the week, and could not go to school. She cleaned, washed, and made the beds of the whole family. One day, Alemtsehay accidentally spilled hot soup and was beaten badly by the lady. After the beating, she left the house and went to the police.

Alemtsehay stayed in a room where the policemen rest at the police station for one year. While she lived there, she did not do anything, including go to school. Another lady took her home, promising that she would bring her up as her guardian. However, she made Alemtsehay do all the household chores and physically abused her. Alemtsehay cooked, washed, cleaned, bakes, split firewood, etc. 16 hours a day for no pay. She did not go to school.

One day, the parents for whom Alemtsehay worked, including the lady who took her from the police station, were out. While they were gone, their son took a roll and ate it. When his parents returned home, they found the bread missing and asked who ate it. Certain that the parents would blame her if she told the truth, Alemtsehay lied and said that she had eaten the bread. The father took her in a room, closed the door, and heated up a knife in the charcoal of a hot fire. Using the hot knife, he burned Alemtsehay's arms and legs. He then reheated the knife in the coals and burned her lips. Alemtsehay ran from the house. The neighbors found her and took her to the police. Eventually, the man who burned her was arrested. However, after one week, he was released.

A person from the Organization for the Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS) found Alemtsehay at the police station. By this time, it had been seven years since Alemtsehay had left Kambo with the relative of her father.

After a long search, OPRIFS was able to contact her mother in Kambo Selale. Her mother had feared that Alemtsehay was dead as the relative had told the family she had disappeared. However, her mother was unable to raise her alone. Therefore, Alemtsehay's aunt took her to stay with a male friend of the family in Addis Ababa.

For the last year, Alemtsehay has been living in Addis Ababa with yet another family friend and his three daughters, ages 20 and older. He provides shelter and food for Alemtsehay, and she is able to go to school in the morning from 9:00 a.m.-noon.

OPRIFS pays for Alemtsehay's school uniform and materials. School always starts in Ethiopia after the Ethiopian New Year, September 11th. On September 20, 2005, Alemtsehay began eighth grade. She completed seventh grade as the highest ranking student in her class.

While she is doing well in school, Alemtsehay desires a better home environment. When she gets home from school, she is expected to do all of the household chores, including cooking, for no pay. She does not like that neither the man nor his daughters ever help with the household chores. She is unable to do her homework until very late in the evening.

Alemtsehay wants to go to university and study history. Government university used to be free in Ethiopia. However, now when school graduates get a job they have to pay back the government. Alemtsehay would like to become a writer. With the money she earns, she intends to help children and appeal to the government to apply the law to protect children.