

September 1994

Press Release

Human Rights in Ethiopia

It is difficult to get accurate information about abuses of human rights in Ethiopia. Only a small fraction of such abuses are set out below. The information was obtained from the following sources:-

1. Gadado, no 11, June 1994. A monthly report by Oromo ex-prisoners, a clandestine human rights group in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa).
2. Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Finfinnee (Addis Ababa).
3. Sagalee Oromo, Journal of Union of Oromo Students in Europe, 19,1, Dec. 1993.
4. Published appeal by elders of Jarso Lafanfa'u, Hararge, sent to Ethiopian Red Cross and international human rights organisations, Sept. 1993.
5. Mr X, Oromo informant, in Oromia for three months up to July 1994, interviewed 15.7.94.
6. Oromo Commentary, 4,1, 1994.
7. Karaa Walabumma, Information Bulletin of Union of Oromo Students in Europe, 18,1, July 1994.
8. Investigating team from Union of Oromo in North America, in Oromia mid to end July 1994.
9. Urji, an Amhatic weekly newspaper, Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), 29.7.94.
10. Selam, clandestine human rights group, Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), contacted 31.7.94.
11. Abdullahi An-Na'im, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch/Africa, statement to Hearing on Ethiopia by US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, Africa Subcommittee, 27.7.94.
12. Africa Confidential, 35,2, 21.1.94.
13. Mulugeta Mossissa, OLF spokesman, Holland. Speech to Annual Congress of Union of Oromo Students in Europe, Berlin, 15.7.94. Also interviewed 17.7.94.
14. B. Gossa, Cairo. Oromo-Net, E-Mail, July 1994.

EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLINGS

2 named Oromo villagers were killed by EPRDF soldiers at Yabbu village, 22 km from Jimma, on 20.4.94. Their bodies were left unattended for three days to intimidate other villagers. (1.)

1 named Oromo was shot dead by EPRDF soldiers in Gimbi, Wallega province on 5.6.94. (1.)

44 named Oromo were killed between April and September 1993 in different areas of Oromia. (2.). It is not known if these include some of the

83 named victims reported killed between July and December 1993 (3.). Sagalee Oromo reports another.

33 unnamed victims in the same period. All but four of the named killings took place in Eastern provinces; estimates of "hundreds" of killings were reported from the West (3.).

26 named Oromo were taken from Jarso Lafanfa'u village, Hararge on 28.8.93 and shot by EPRDF soldiers (4.).

2 named Oromo students from Salale, N. Showa, were shot dead in February/March 1994 following their expressing pro-OLF sentiments. Their parents were forbidden to look for their bodies for several days, when they were found in a gully, partly eaten by hyenas (5.)

8 named Oromo were shot at Hurso camp, after two years detention, in January 1994 (6.).

51 prisoners at the same camp were selected and executed on 20.11.93 (7.).

"Hundreds" die in prison camps due to maltreatment, and disease caused by insanitary conditions and denial of medical care (1.,3.,6.,7.).

IMPRISONMENT WITHOUT TRIAL

Unknown numbers of civilians are held in many prisons throughout the empire. Much publicised releases are followed by rearrests and transfer to other camps or prisons. For example, most of those released from Hurso before the June elections were retaken two or three weeks later and are now held at Akaki/Bishooftu, near Finfinnee (8.).

Fifty five named Oromo from different parts of the country were imprisoned between August and October 1994. At least 250 unnamed were taken at the same time. (3.)

When investigators from the International Committee of the Red Cross, the US Embassy and U.S.A.I.D made separate visits to Bilate and Dhidhessa camps, on one occasion 328 prisoners were released three days before the investigators' arrival and 114 hidden in the forest. On another occasion 184 were hidden. Back in early 1993 no less than two thousand prisoners were hidden from a US Embassy official visiting Dhidhessa (1.).

DISAPPEARANCES

7 named and 3 unnamed Oromo were taken by EPRDF soldiers in Finfinnee between mid-May and June 2nd this year. The whereabouts of these and 8 named long term disappeared are unknown (1.).

2 named Oromo were taken by EPRDF soldiers in Finfinnee on 15.7.94 (9.).

5 named and 24 unnamed disappeared in Finfinnee in late 1993 and January 1994 (6.).

17 named disappearances elsewhere in Oromia occurred between July and December 1993 (6.,7.)

"Any quarrel with the TPLF, even if non-political, is likely to lead to disappearance" (10.).

PRESS RESTRICTIONS

A free press briefly blossomed in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) after the fall of Mengistu. It is now almost extinguished by the imposition of press laws liberally interpreted by the regime. These laws are being used to harass and intimidate the opposition press (11.,12.). At least 58 journalists, including several editors, have been or are being held by the authorities (11.).

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council is being verbally attacked by the government. Its chairman has been released on bail following his arrest for criticising the government. (11.)

The limited press freedom which exists in the capital is not found elsewhere. Literature, allowed in Finfinnee despite anti-government sentiments, is seized if found on persons outside the capital. Those found with such magazines or newspapers outside Finfinnee are liable to be beaten. "It is unthinkable that these could be sold outside Finfinnee" (5.).

There is no free Oromo radio station at present. Of the two Amhara stations broadcast from the US or Europe, one concentrates on vilifying the OLF and refers to Oromo as "Galla", a derogatory term despised by the Oromo (8.).

RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION

On 26.2.94 the wedding of two Oromo was refused by the priest of Entoto Parish Church (Mekane Yesus denomination) because the group insisted on singing in the Oromo language, Oromifaa. The president of the church, Kababo Daka, said on 13.3.94 that a spirit of evil had entered the church and that it was God's will that only Amharic be used in the church.(1.)

On 1.4.94 and 10.4.94 the Geja Protestant Church and the home of its president, respectively, were burnt down by Ethiopian Orthodox Church followers. On 12.4.94 an armed militia man raped a member of the congregation. Despite documented evidence available the EPRDF police made no charges. (1.)

At Geja Qechema, Finfinnee, under threat of confiscation of property and animals, five Protestant farmers were forced to be rebaptised in the Orthodox faith (1.).

In Finfinnee at least, Mekane Yesus Church authorities are not allowing sermons to be preached in Oromifaa to Oromo congregations (6.).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church of Chanco, a small town 40 km north of Finfinnee, refused to bury Miss Aberash Dabala in December 1993. She had been teaching Oromo literacy (6.).

Orthodox priests leading Epiphany processions in different parts of Oromia in January 1994, stopped the processions saying that the Tabots (arks) refused to enter their churches unless the procession as a whole publicly denounced Qubee, the Latin Oromo script (6.).

ABUSES OF EMPLOYEES AND BUSINESSES

Government employees are encouraged to join the EPRDF-affiliated Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation (OPDO). If they refuse they are dismissed, demoted, suspended or transferred. (5.)

Thousands of Oromo civil servants have been dismissed, including 40 university professors and teachers. Opponents of the EPRDF are being replaced by supporters, mainly from Tigray. (6.)

Businesses of opponents are being confiscated and property, including vehicles, transferred to supporters, some to Tigray itself (8.,10.,13.). Twenty five cases of confiscation of property when civilians were arrested are reported in Gadado (1.) and more in Karaa Walabumma (7.).

Expropriated property ends up in the hands of TPLF soldiers, other Tigreans or supporters (10.).

Foreign aid and loans for developing local business enterprises only go to Tigreans or supporters (7.).

Hundreds of employees of the Electricity Generating Company were invited to a "meeting" in Finfinnee in June. They were taken against their wishes by bus to Tigray. They completed the electrification of Tigray (erecting pylons and power lines etc.) by mid July, taking power from Finca'aa hydro-electric station about 275 km west of Finfinnee. (8.)

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Oromo conversations are monitored by TPLF spies "in every bar and restaurant". One Oromo reported being approached in June by a Tigrean ex-student colleague, while having a conversation in Oromifaa in a Finfinnee bar . He was told to be careful and that he would have been reported had the Tigrean not been a former friend. (5., 10.)

The Tigrean Development Association is ostensibly a professional men's association. It has members in "every working place". Two sources claim that its real purpose is to collect information for the TPLF. (5.,10.)

The EPRDF/TPLF security budget doubled this year (14.).