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PRESS RELEASE December 1998 - January 1999 No. 26

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## Human Rights Abuses in Ethiopia

The Oromia Support Group is a non-political organisation which attempts to raise awareness of human rights abuses in Ethiopia. OSG lobbies western governments to withdraw support from the Ethiopian government until it abides by its constitution which guarantees human rights and self-determination for all peoples of Ethiopia.

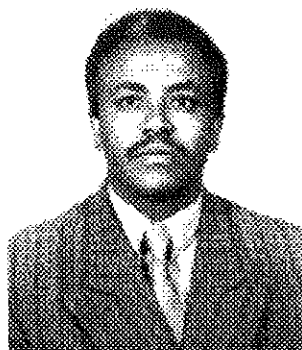
OSG has now reported 2,418 extra-judicial killings and 676 disappearances of civilians suspected of supporting groups opposing the government. Most of these have been Oromo people. Scores of thousands of civilians have been imprisoned. Torture and rape of prisoners is commonplace, especially in secret detention centres, whose existence is denied by the government.

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## ADDIS ABABA AND CENTRAL OROMIA REGION

### Government purge of Oromo intelligentsia



*Garoma Bekele, writer, journalist, General Secretary of the Human Rights League, detained October 1997.*



*Tesfaye Deressa, poet, song writer and journalist, detained October 1997.*



*Moti Biyya, writer, journalist and political analyst, detained September 1997.*

International PEN, in a press release on the Day of the Imprisoned Writer, 15 November 1998, announced its appeal to the Ethiopian government for the immediate and unconditional release of *URJII* newspaper journalists Moti Biyya, Tesfaye Deressa and Garoma Bekele, unless they are promptly charged and tried.

All the staff of *URJII* were used to detention and the payment of extortionate fines. Organisations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists have long campaigned against the notorious Ethiopian Press Law, under which the detention of journalists has put Ethiopia in the top ten enemies of the press for each of the last three years. No other country in Africa imprisons more journalists.

But these arrests were different. They were part of an orchestrated attack by the government against the flower of the Oromo movement, as promoted by the government journal, *Hizbaawi Adera*, two years ago (reported in *Sagalee Haaraa*, No. 21, Jan-Feb 1998).

Moti Biyya, 42 year old father of three, had been behind bars for a month before 37 year old Tesfaye Deressa and his immediate boss, Editor in Chief of *URJII*, Solomon Namarra, were taken on 16 October 1997.

Garoma Bekele, 38 year old father of one, was General Manager of *URJII* and was also General Secretary of the Human Rights League for eight months before he was detained.

The detention of these journalists was part of a sweep across the cream of Oromo society, including board members of the Human Rights League (a recently formed and legally registered human rights education and reporting group), the Macha-Tulama Association (a 35 year old Oromo self-help organisation), staff of the Oromo Relief Association (a major indigenous relief and development organisation, closed by the government in 1995) and Oromo journalists.

Three murders, several disappearances and 31 detentions of prominent Oromo occurred in Addis Ababa in October and November 1997. In March 1998, another 34 of the most skilled Oromo

were detained, including medical staff who had worked for a clinic caring for Oromo in Addis Ababa.

Sixty five Oromo - nurses, doctors, judges, civil servants, accountants, teachers etc. - were detained and charged with conspiracy, as the government's grip on the Oromo nationalist movement tightened and nearly all prominent Oromo - the innovators, the leaders, the organisers, the thinkers and the writers - were targeted. They have now spent 10-16 months in prison without their cases being settled.

After lengthy periods of poor conditions and solitary confinement in Maikelawi Special Investigation Centre, the journalists can now see visitors, at Karchale prison. Moti Biyya, however, is said to have recently been transferred to Asella, Arsi province.

Solomon Namarra was chained hand and foot until recently and relied on other detainees to be fed. Beyene Belissa, a 51 year old amputee and employee of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency, spent months on the floor, unable to care for his bodily needs, because his artificial leg was smashed.

*URJII* newspaper closed down after two more of its journalists, Waqshum Bacha and Alemu Tolessa were detained in December. Waqshum has since been released and Alemu's release is expected. Tamrat Gemeda, a journalist with the other Oromo newspaper, *Seife Nebelbal*, remains in detention, along with at least ten other journalists.

Amnesty International considers many of the detained Oromo to be prisoners of conscience, including the *URJII* journalists and members of the Human Rights League. Among them are Addisu Beyene, a founder member of the Human Rights League and Director of the Oromo Relief Association, who was trying to fight the government's closure of ORA in the courts, and Sister Zewditu Deressa, detained in April 1998, mother of four and a nurse in the Black Lion hospital who used to work at the Hirot Ber (Gate of Life) clinic - closed by the government in 1996. She had been trying to reclaim confiscated equipment from the government, through the legal system.

Also included in the 65 charged with conspiracy, are Hussein Abdi, former Ministry of Foreign Affairs official; Beyene Abdi, 73 year old member of the Committee of Oromo Elders, teacher, parliamentarian and judge; Tilahun Hirpassa, unwell following chest surgery, torture victim from 1992-3, former ORA official and teacher; Gabissa Lemessa, Save the Children Fund accountant; Haji Sahlu Kebte, member of Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and former civil servant; Zewde Chamada, geography teacher; Gadissa Bultosa, employee of Oromia Agricultural Bureau; Adam Hassen; Adugna Fitee; Mohammed Wayu, employee of Oromia Civil Service Bureau; and Hailu Terfassa Tasso, Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus hostel manager. All are board members of the Human Rights League or belong to the Macha-Tulama Association, or both.

Other health professionals include Dr Gizaw Irana and nurse Tsige Kebede, who used to work at the Hirot Ber clinic.

## Disappearances

Despite information, received from several sources within Addis Ababa, that presently there are widespread detentions and disappearances of Oromo throughout the capital, OSG has received little detailed data.

**Imiru Gurmeessa**, 'a resident of Addis Ababa (Kebele 13, Higher 8), was kidnapped by members of the government security forces on December 12, 1998 while he was having tea at a recreational club near his residence. His family and friends do not know his whereabouts.'

He had been detained and tortured previously, by the Derg administration.

**Alemayehu Itafa**, 'a resident of Adama, East Showa, was kidnapped from his private clinic on December 1, 1998, at 4 pm, by three government security agents. His family and friends do not know his whereabouts.'

*Seife Nebelbal* newspaper, Addis Ababa, 18 December 1998.

## **Harassment, death in detention**

**Merga Abera Demie**, 28 years old, was active in the Oromo student movement in Russia before returning to Addis Ababa in July 1995, to work in his family's cosmetics and butter business. He worked with other Oromo activists, and went into hiding when one of his contacts disappeared on 7 August 1996. Government forces went to his home in the capital on 16 August. Because they were unable to find Merga, they detained, interrogated and beat his elderly father. **His friend, who disappeared, was found dead in detention three weeks later.** Another colleague was arrested on his way to Djibouti in August 1996 and has subsequently disappeared

Correspondence from victim, seeking asylum in Germany, 3 December 1998.

## **EASTERN OROMIA REGION**

### **Killing**

The death of **Abdulahi Kassim**, of Genale, Dodolla, Bale province, at the hands of government soldiers, some time between June 1996 and October 1997, is reported by his father, Kassim Hasso Finkilla (see Imprisonment, torture and harassment, below).

Letter from father of victim, 11 December 1998.

### **Disappearances**

Previously unreported disappearances of two brothers, **Abdulkadir (Galmo)** and **Abdulwahab Adam Aliyi**, sons of businessman and Qadi (Moslem judge) Adam Aliyi Osman (see Imprisonment etc, below), of Hirna town, E. Hararge, occurred in mid-1992, shortly after the Oromo Liberation Front left the transitional government.

Also previously unreported is the disappearance in 1995 of **Mohammed Yusuf Tussa**, a wealthy businessman from Hirna, E. Hararge.

Statement by father/acquaintance of victims, 10 November 1998.

### **Imprisonment, torture and harassment**

**Adam Aliyi Osman**, businessman, farmer and Qadi (Moslem judge) in Hirna town, E. Hararge, went into hiding after the OLF left the transitional government in 1992. His family were regarded

as active OLF sympathisers and while he was in hiding, two of his sons disappeared (see above). Immediately on his return home in 1994, government soldiers took him from his house at midnight after beating him in front of his family. He was held for three weeks and fled when told by a friend within the local administration that government soldiers were looking for a pretext to kill him. Since he left the area, his wife, **Kadija Ahmed**, has been subject to repeated detention and interrogation.

Statement by victim, 10 November, 1998.

**Kassim Hasso Finkilla**, a farmer in Genale, near to Dodolla town, Bale, wrote of his persecution from 1993 to 1996:

*On November 2nd 1993, my house was surrounded by EPRDF or TPLF armed forces and broken into and I was beaten hard on my back and leg. [He complains of continued pain since that beating.] I was driven to the nearby town of Dodolla army camp, where human beings were being threatened at gunpoint and sometimes would be killed.*

He was detained for eight months.

*I was kept in a small dark room where nobody could differentiate between day and night. Both my hands and feet were tied so that the palm side of my feet remained raised up. They put an iron rod between my arms and feet and suspended between the edge of two tables. I was gagged to avoid my shouting. I was beaten on the palms of my feet. . . . I was released on condition that I would report weekly, putting a signature in their office.*

Following local skirmishes between government forces and soldiers of the Oromo Liberation Front, he was again detained and tortured at the same camp on 1 June 1996. He was released sixteen months later, again under security surveillance, . . . *on condition that I should not attend public gatherings or meetings, not to go out of my home town, Dodolla, etc.*

*When I was released from prison, I learned that one of my sons, Abdulahi Kassim had been killed by the army of EPRDF and the rest of my family displaced. Because of many problems, they were forced to scatter in different directions . . . , also all my property was stolen and taken by government security men.*

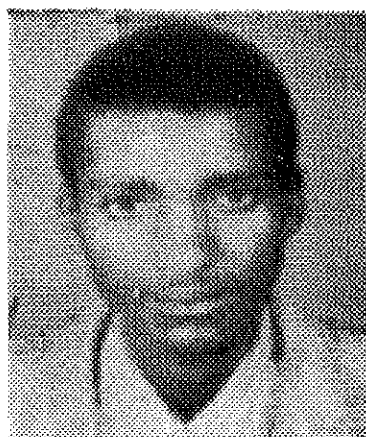
By this time he had contracted TB from the detention centre. He risked going to Addis Ababa for treatment. While he was in the capital he heard that government soldiers had been to his home, looking for him. He therefore fled the country.

Letter from victim, 11 December 1998.

## WESTERN OROMIA REGION

### Killing

**Gemeda Chaniyalew Mosissa** of Lecka Dullecha town, Arjo, Wallega province, was killed on 16 August 1993, according to a close relative. The death has not been previously reported by OSG. OSG's informant wrote that after fighting between government troops and OLF fighters, . . . *EPRDF soldiers started to check civilian houses and collect the men in prison. Some soldiers came to Gemeda's family*



**Gemeda Chaniyalew  
Mosissa**

home. And they called him out, kicking and beating him. On the way to prison, his mother was following them and asking them not to take him. One of the soldiers fired a gun over her head. She fell down from anxiety. Gemeda shouted 'They have killed my mother'. Soon they bursted many bullets to him and he fell down bleeding. The soldiers went away considering him dead. He died later at a local clinic.

Armed soldiers appeared at the house two days after his funeral. His brother, **Damtew Chaniyalew Mosissa**, saw the soldiers coming and ran off. He was chased by soldiers who were shooting at him. It is not known if he escaped or not. The mother of the two young men is 'still not healthy' to this day.



**Damtew Chaniyalew  
Mosissa**

Letter from close relative of victims, Djibouti, 23 December 1998.

## SOUTHERN OROMIA REGION

### Imprisonment, torture and harassment

**Efrem Benyam Sado**, 29 year old primary school teacher, Kofale district, Chillalo, Arsi province, was detained in military barracks at Shashamene from 6 July to 13 October 1992. He was thus in the first wave of detentions (of between 20,000 and 45,000 Oromo) following the withdrawal of the OLF from government. He wrote:

*In detention, I was cruelly treated . . . I have witnessed the killing of fellow detainees. I myself was threatened with death several times. They pointed a gun at my forehead and put the muzzle of a gun into my mouth and vowed to kill me if I failed to respond positively to their interrogation. I was also kept in solitary confinement and not allowed medical assistance for injuries . . . Denial of food is one of the punishments.*

*I was deeply traumatised and still suffering from its effects. I was interrogated to reveal my alleged relationship with OLF . . . all I knew about clandestine activities . . . members and supporters among others.*

*Finally, after long suffering I was given strong warning to not do any political activity and they made me sign a document . . . they released me on October 13 1992. In 1994, I was elected as executive committee member of the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) in my district. After learning of the allegation that I was an OLF member, the government suspended me from the ETA committee and then sacked me from my teaching job.*

*In 1995, to provide for myself and my family, under supervision of the district education office, I opened an adult education school in the town of Kofale to teach Oromo alphabet and Oromo language. Again they gave me last warning to stop the teaching process which they alleged I was doing for the OLF political objective. I was teaching pure language and alphabet of Oromo, how to write and read and I was forced to stop.*

In 1996, government security men came to his home.

*I was not at home and I got the information that they were following me. I hid myself and as a result of that they looted all my belongings. They arrested my father to get me back and up to now*

*my father is languishing in their prison. After that I went into hiding, changing from one place to another. They followed me up still. The Ethiopian government security never stopped searching for me. I narrowly escaped arrest quite a few times.*

He then fled the country.

Letter from victim, 30 November 1998.



## OROMO RELIEF ASSOCIATION PRESS RELEASE

### *Urgent refugee situation in the Horn of Africa*

Meeting 13 – 15 November 1998 in Falkenburg, Germany, the First International Conference for the Co-ordination of Support Committees of the Oromo Relief Association heard reports on the human rights situation in Ethiopia, on the effects of the military hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia and on the refugee situation in the Horn of Africa. The increasing number of Oromo and other refugees from Ethiopia in the Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti is a reflection of the deterioration of the political situation within Ethiopia.

Over the last year and a half, the current Ethiopian government, dominated by the northern Tigre Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and operating within the framework of a constitution that is formally democratic, but actually under the exclusive single party control of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), has strengthened its military and internal security hold on the country and has been increasingly suppressing the human rights of those nationalities and groups, particularly in the southern part of the country, which are basically in opposition to the current regime.

The humanitarian and development work of the Oromo Relief Association within Oromia – the area in Ethiopia where the largest nationality within the country lives – was closed down by the government in 1995 and 1996, the Executive Director, Mr. Addisu Beyene, and members of the Board of Directors were arrested one year ago, Oromo journalists were arrested and the private Oromo newspaper, *URJII*, was suppressed. The arrest of the Secretary and Board members of the Oromo-based Human Rights League (HRL) in November 1997 and the closure of its office in March of this year have effectively silenced an important voice for documenting the arbitrary arrests, disappearance of individuals, torture of detainees, the interminable prolongation of court cases, extra-judicial executions and other human rights violations which are continuing and which are contrary even to the constitution and legal commitments of the Ethiopian State.

The suppression has affected other nationalities: the Afar, the Somalis in the Ogaden, the Sidamas and others, and even those sections of the large Amhara population that oppose the rule of the northern Tigres, leading to a renewal of armed resistance in various parts of the country.

The military hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia which broke out earlier this year and have flared up over the last weeks are adding to the flight of refugees from the country. Reports received at the meeting pointed out that young people of conscription age are fleeing the country under the forced conscription policy of the Ethiopian government. Under the call to war, soldiers forcibly conscripted, remembering the similar situation to that under the dictator Mengistu Hailemariam, are being induced to desert.

It was reported that there are some 15,000 Oromo refugees in the Sudan. The estimated number is 350,000 in Somalia, more than 25,000 in Djibouti and 15,000-20,000 in Kenya. In Nairobi alone, 20 Oromo refugees are arriving daily. The vast number of the refugees are not registered with UNHCR, the refugee organisation of the United Nations.

Unless there is a fundamental change of policy within Ethiopia, which allows genuine participatory democracy for all nationalities, and freedom for diverse political groups to organise and compete for support, unless there is full recognition of and adherence to the human rights of the whole population, and unless there can be a fair and negotiated end to military hostilities in the Horn of Africa, the number of those fleeing Ethiopia will increase. The International Conference has authorised its Executive Committee and its Co-ordinator to bring this situation and their assessment of it to the attention of appropriate bodies of the international community.

Because of the closure of the offices and work of ORA within Oromia and the arrest of its officers, the Support Groups and Branch Offices of ORA abroad have been functioning autonomously. At this meeting it was decided to co-ordinate their work on a continuing basis. Present at the conference were the representatives of Support Groups and Branch Offices in Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America.

Falkenburg, 15 November 1998.

Ruediger Jentsch, Chairman of the German Support Group and the Conference.

Terfa Dibaba, International Co-ordinator.

## ERITREA COMPLAINS ABOUT DEATHS IN ETHIOPIAN CAMP

The Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced from Asmara, on 18 November, that it had been informed by the International Committee of the Red Cross about the deaths of three young Eritrean men in Bilate camp, Sidama province, Southern Peoples Region. From 1992 the camp has been notorious for unsanitary conditions and disease, especially malaria, dysentery and TB. Many thousand Oromo were detained there in 1992 and 1993.

**Gebrekidan Zekarias**, a 34 year old university student who was studying in Ethiopia on an exchange program between the two countries, was detained on 13 June in Addis Ababa, and died in Bilate on 7 October 1998.

**Said Sahada Ahmed**, 28 year old prisoner of war, captured at Zalambesa on 30 June, also died on 7 October.

**Dawit Tewolde Gufar**, a civilian internee arrested on 18 June in the capital, died one week later on 13 October.

According to the statement *Eritrea also calls for the immediate release of the 1,500 civilians, including 37 university exchange students, who have now spent over five months in prison. They were imprisoned by the Ethiopian Government en masse, illegally and without due process of law. Meanwhile, Ethiopia continues its massive deportation of Eritrans and of Ethiopians of Eritrean origin, with impunity. The number of deportees has now reached over 35,000. These were picked up from their homes in the middle of the night, taken to prisons under armed guard where they were held for periods ranging from a few days to four months and then boarded on buses which dumped them on the front-lines on the border. The deportations have resulted in massive separation of families and large scale confiscation of their properties.*



# HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH WORLD REPORT 1999

## ETHIOPIA : HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

The Ethiopian government, led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), continued to implement an ambitious program of political and economic reforms with significant donor support.

Ethnically-based federal regions assumed executive, legislative, and judicial powers provided for under the 1994 constitution. The EPRDF maintained strict control over this process through parties affiliated to it which dominated regional governments. A handful of opposition parties, notably the All Amhara Peoples' Organization (AAPPO) and the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPD), preserved a precarious presence in the capital Addis Ababa, following years of relentless government curtailment of their activities, particularly in the countryside. Tensions persisted between the government and ethnic fronts which withdrew from earlier alliances with the EPRDF over their insistence that constitutionally guaranteed self-determination rights be immediately exercised in their regions.

Sporadic clashes occurred in Oromia and Somali regional states between government troops and fighters from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) respectively. Tension remained high along the borders with Somalia where the government responded to incursions by the fundamentalist Al-Ittihad Al-Islami (Islamic Unity) by striking at its strongholds across the border and by backing armed factions in Somalia opposed to Al-Ittihad.

Wide-scale human rights violations occurred in the context of the government's suppression of armed insurgency and political dissent. The military and rural militia associated with parties affiliated to the EPRDF arrested thousands for months without charge or trial on account of their suspected support of armed insurgencies. Opposition activists, editors of the private press, and leaders of labor organizations who continued to challenge the EPRDF's monopolization of political space were systematically targeted through harassment and repeated detentions.

Overcrowding, poor hygiene, and inadequate food compounded the plight of detainees. However, the government granted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) increasing access to places of detention in 1997 and 1998, and cooperated with its efforts to assist inmates. The humanitarian agency reported visiting by the end of 1997 some 10,980 people held in connection with the 1991 ouster of the former regime or for security reasons, and registering 5,660 new detainees.

The close political and strategic alliance between Ethiopia and Eritrea collapsed in early May when a minor border dispute flared up into brief violent confrontations. Hundreds were killed on both sides, mainly civilians. The fighting displaced thousands of villagers on both sides of the border. Fighting ceased in mid-June following intense mediation efforts, but a massive military buildup by both states continued as a bitter propaganda war and the pursuit of escalation by extremists on both sides reduced the chances of a negotiated settlement.

Both sides traded accusations of ill-treatment of their citizens whom the conflict had found on the wrong side of the border. Eritrea denied deliberately expelling Ethiopians and said its policy would remain one of welcoming and protecting Ethiopians willing to stay, but a September 26 statement by the Eritrean foreign ministry put the number of Ethiopians who had "voluntarily returned" to their country at 6,600.

Compelling evidence pointed to a deliberate campaign by the Ethiopian authorities to expel Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin to Eritrea. By late October, an estimated thirty thousand, most of them Ethiopian citizens who had not taken up Eritrean nationality in the aftermath of

Eritrea's 1991 secession from Ethiopia, were deported after experiencing systematic denial of their human rights. The campaign swiftly degenerated from selective targeting to indiscriminate deportations. A government "policy" statement on June 11 said the "550,000 Eritreans residing in Ethiopia" could continue to live and work peacefully there. However, as a "precautionary measure," the statement ordered members of Eritrean political and community organizations to leave the country on account of their suspected support of the Eritrean war effort, and gave a mandatory leave of absence of one month to Eritreans occupying "sensitive" jobs. While authorities initially suggested an option of voluntary departure for the targeted categories, they later began rounding up people on the sole basis of their being Eritrean or of Eritrean extraction, and apparently without making an effort to distinguish between the two categories. Not all who fell in the dragnet were deported. Those of military age were sent to detention camps where an unknown number remained held by late October without charge or trial. Others were trucked, after brief detentions, to remote border posts and ordered to cross into Eritrea on foot. Those detained and expelled included many elderly retired citizens of Ethiopia, mainly businessmen who had lived most of their lives and raised their children in other provinces of Ethiopia while Eritrea fought for its independence. The government ordered the freezing of their assets and revoked their business licenses, stripping them and their families of their livelihood. Many families were separated during the deportations from underage children who were not allowed to leave with them, or, in a few cases, from children who were deported unaccompanied.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in an interview with Radio Ethiopia on July 9 said the deportees were "foreigners," adding that ". . . any foreign national, whether Eritrean or Japanese etc. . . . lives in Ethiopia because of the goodwill of the Ethiopian government. If we say 'Go, because we don't like the color of your eyes,' they have to leave." The issue was, however, more complex than the prime minister's assertion suggested. For the forty years preceding Eritrean independence in 1991 both countries were part of the same internationally recognized state. Strong cultural, religious, and linguistic affinities existed between the two people, and intermarriages were common. The Ethiopian constitution, in its Article 6, grants citizenship by birth to any person with one or both Ethiopian parents. Many Eritreans had retained their Ethiopian nationality when Eritrea became independent, and Ethiopia did not take any legal measure to rescind their citizenship then. As a consequence, the Ethiopian government had no legal basis to consider many of the deportees as aliens. The roundup, detention, and the ill-treatment of which the deportees, whether nationals or aliens, were the victims violated rights of nondiscrimination and freedom of movement that the Ethiopian constitution guaranteed. The deportations and accompanying violations of a range of rights of the deportees also violated Ethiopia's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other human rights treaties it has ratified and indeed incorporated into the law of the land.

The harassment and imprisonment on political grounds of opposition leaders continued. Professor Asrat Woldeyes, the president of the opposition All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO) who was imprisoned in 1994, was hospitalized in January for treatment for diabetes and other health complications; he was nearly seventy, and also suffered heart problems. The government adamantly refused to bend to domestic and international appeals, including from Human Rights Watch, for his release. By late October his condition had improved, but he remained under guard in his hospital room. He was serving consecutive prison sentences of two and three years in Addis Ababa central prison after convictions for "inciting armed rebellion." He credibly complained that he did not receive fair trials, but his appeals were rejected. He and another twenty-two AAPO leaders faced another trial which began in 1995 on new charges of "armed rebellion." The court refused to examine claims by several co-defendants that their confessions implicating the group

were obtained under torture. Abera Yemane Ab, an activist jailed since December 1993 when he returned to Addis Ababa from his U.S. exile to participate in a conference on peace and reconciliation, was allowed in late September only a few minutes' encounter with a son he hadn't seen since he was incarcerated. The government denied the son further visits on the grounds that he, a holder of a U.S. passport, was a foreigner.

Security forces on September 17 surrounded the headquarters of the elected Ethiopian Teachers' Association in Addis Ababa, and ordered ETA's officials to hand the premises over to a government-sponsored "teachers' association." ETA's executive committee members present at the time, Shimeles Zewdi, Abate Angore, and Aweke Mulugeta, were detained without a court order and were only released on October 15. The latter two were briefly detained following a similar raid on ETA's compound on August 13. The premises had survived as a symbol of ETA's autonomy, and were a nagging reminder of the association's persistent rejection of ethnic federalism policies, particularly when applied in the field of education. Previous attacks on the association since its conflict with the government started in 1992 included the closure of its regional and local offices, the freezing of its accounts, and the repeated detention of its officials. In May 1996, the association's president Dr. Taye Woldesemayat was arrested and charged, together with five others, with "armed conspiracy." Exactly a year later, Assefa Maru, his replacement as head of ETA and a human rights advocate, was gunned down by the police who accused him after the fact of participating in an armed insurgency.

Dr. Taye Woldesemayat was subjected to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in Addis Ababa central prison where he was transferred after his arrest and remained. The presiding judge denied bail, and when the teachers' leader repeatedly complained that he was being harassed by his guards, the judge failed to act decisively to restrain them. The guards in February placed Woldesemayat in a death-row cell known as the "darkness cell." When he again complained about the conditions of his detention in a July 28 hearing, the presiding judge, holding him in contempt, ordered him put in chains for twenty-four hours a day until a hearing scheduled for September 29. The constant stress from these conditions and daily verbal abuse by his guards reportedly exacted a heavy psychological and physical toll on Woldesemayat.

Authorities in March arrested thirty-four individuals and charged them with armed conspiracy with the Oromo Liberation Front. They joined in prison an earlier group of thirty-one prominent members of the Oromo community who were arrested in October and November 1997 and faced similar charges, punishable by from five years' imprisonment to death. The government claimed that some of the sixty-five Oromos were OLF fighters and accused the others of membership in OLF "support groups." The "groups" in question included the newly founded Human Rights League; the Oromo Relief Association dissolved by the government in 1995; the newspaper *URJII*, which ceased publishing after the arrest of key journalists; an Oromo cultural revival association; and a medical clinic catering for the Oromo community in Addis Ababa. Typically, the trial started with a round of adjournments which the government attributed to lack of judges.

Personnel shortages and meager resources indeed led to severe delays in the courts and slowed down the restructuring of the judiciary in line with the federal system. With a backlog of thousands of cases by late 1998 in Addis Ababa alone, and few judges to clear it, one year adjournments became routine in the court system, with suspects and defendants having to spend long months in pretrial detention. The legal rights of prisoners to speedy and fair trials thus remained seriously compromised. Prisoners facing trial on political and security charges credibly claimed that the government was using the near paralysis of the justice system to neutralize them and their parties, associations, and newspapers for years at a time without appearing to be using an iron fist. Long term detention before even coming to trial faced some prisoners held solely for the nonviolent exercise

of their freedom of expression and association. Detention for indefinite periods also applied to those accused of serious crimes and violence with political dimensions. A case in point of the latter was the internationally supported trial of officials of the previous Derg regime for crimes against humanity, an initiative once lauded as a major strike against impunity but which was seriously tarnished by its unconscionably slow pace. On September 10, the Office of the Special Prosecutor announced the release of thirty-one defendants who had been in pretrial detention for seven years for lack of evidence.

Repression against the independent press escalated to unprecedented levels in the last quarter of 1997 and in 1998. There were seventeen detained journalists in Ethiopia in late October. The brief but often repeated detentions of journalists observed in most of 1997 gave way to the crippling practice of wholesale arrests of key members of the editorial and managerial staff of vocal publications, a tactic which amounted to the virtual banning of the targeted publications. Five journalists from the pro-Oromo weekly *URJII* remained in detention since their arrest in the last quarter of 1997, including the editor-in-chief and his deputy and the reporter Garoma Bekele, who at the time was also secretary of the newly founded Human Rights League. Together with other Oromo leaders rounded up during that period, they faced charges of armed conspiracy with the OLF: prosecutors accused *URJII* of being an organ of the OLF. The crackdown came shortly after an early October article in which the newspaper challenged the official version of the killing of three Oromo activists in Addis Ababa which the government claimed had occurred during a shootout. The newspaper cited eyewitnesses who claimed the three were killed without warning. *URJII* ceased publishing following the onslaught. The private weekly *Tobia* suffered a similar fate when four editors were arrested on January 16, 1998 following the paper's publication of a leaked internal U.N. memorandum recommending security precautions to its staff. Hours after their arrest, the newspaper's offices were burned to the ground, its equipment, archive, and database totally destroyed. The newspaper ceased publishing but reappeared after the release of its journalists in July and August. Despite repeated appeals by media watchdogs for an investigation of the fire, its origin remained undetermined by late October. On July 13, Shimelis Kamal, Berhane Negash, and Teferi Mokennen of *Nishan*, an independent Amharic weekly newspaper which at the time had published just eight issues, were arrested for an article criticizing the government's deportation of Eritreans. Freed a day later, they were immediately rearrested for issuing a press release criticizing their arrest and detained without a court order for a month. In the interim, police ignored two orders issued by a judge to either charge or release them immediately. The crackdown succeeded in eroding the commitment of the sole financial backer of *Nishan*: the paper ceased publishing when he withdrew his support. For denouncing in a press release in February the government's muzzling of the independent press, Kifle Mulate, editor of *Ethio-Time* and national coordinator of the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association, was himself detained for six months. Repeated arrests had forced the leaders of that association and some twenty other journalists into exile.

## **LATE NEWS: Rape of child**

**Kullanii Abdulbasit Bushera Adam**, date of birth 13 January 1991, has been living with relatives in Dire Dawa, E. Hararge, since her parents were interrogated, repeatedly tortured and forced to flee as refugees to a nearby country. Her mother had been raped by three government soldiers.

Kullanii was only eight years old when she was raped by a government soldier in October 1998. She required hospital treatment, according to her father, who wrote from exile on 11 January.