
PRESS RELEASE May - July 1999 No. 28

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 2,431 extra-judicial killings and 697 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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TIGRAI REGION

Oromo students and relatives detained in Mekele - Disappearances

Since OSG reported the detention of students and their relatives, who had gone in search of them, in Mekele, Tigray, it has been reported that 15 were detained and have disappeared. The four named in Press Release 27 are among those disappeared; **Tadale Dabalee** (from Borana), **Waariyoo Guyyuu** (Borana), **Dhugaasaa Akkayu** (Wollega) and **Obbo Ramadaan** (Harar). **Fikadu Bekele** (Fiche, N. Showa) and **Tarekegne Belai** (Shashemane, S. Showa) are separately reported to have disappeared. The detainees are rumoured to be being held in Northern Police Headquarters in Mekele. They were attending Mekele Business College until it was closed due to the war with Eritrea.

Clandestine Human Rights Group A, Addis Ababa, February 1999.
Letter from acquaintance of victims, Addis Ababa, 12 May 1999.

FORCED CONSCRIPTION: KILLINGS

Grade 9 students and above, especially Grades 11 & 12, have been targeted to such an extent that at least in some schools and colleges, in E. Showa and Wallega provinces, students have kept away. Students write that they are being questioned about their opinion on the war with Eritrea. Unless they show enthusiasm for the war, they are accused of being supporters of the Oromo Liberation Front.

Some have refused outright to be conscripted, saying they were at their school or college to be educated, not conscripted. Others have fled, frightened, into hiding and their parents have been forced to sign guarantees of producing them. A teacher has absconded from Dembi Dollo, Wallega. No reprisals have been reported from there, but at least two young men from Wallega were shot for resisting conscription, in Nekemte and Billa.

A 28 year old man from the eastern part of Nekemte, Wallega, was shot on 9 May for refusing conscription. He was taken to the hospital, in the western part of the town, and when asked by the hospital to name the victim, the TPLF soldiers who had shot him said 'Ejjeta Manna' meaning 'the price for not obeying'. He died shortly afterwards.

Another man shot dead for resisting conscription, in his home in Billa town, near Nejo, Wallega, is the son of **Ayalew**, and thought to be **Tamrat Ayalew**, the family breadwinner and prominent community member. The murdered man had been forcibly conscripted under the Dergue, to fight in Eritrea.

Letters from correspondents in Ethiopia, April and May, 1999.

Transcripts of interviews with prisoners of war, taken by Eritrean forces at Badme and Tserona, were recorded in Eritrea, on April 23. The eleven interviewees were Oromo from all quarters of Oromia Region, one Somali and one Kaficho (from Kafa, now part of the Southern Peoples Region). They were aged 17 – 19. Only one enlisted of his own free will, believing that peace was imminent. Coercion and force were used on the others. A 17 year old from Gimbi, Wallega, said '*On the day I was captured for the army, a policeman got hold of me. . . . After he collected other youths, he started to register us. . . . all of those who seemed to resist were put under arrest.* A 19

year old from Illubabor said 'One day I was on my way to school to take an examination. I was captured and taken to a detention centre'. An 18 year old from the same province said '... the commander of our area told me that I had to join the army even if I didn't like it. My father was arrested... and told to bring me to the registration centre... I decided to go to them to get my father released'. His younger brother was similarly forced to join up. His fate is unknown.

Interviews recorded by Oromo Relief Association investigator, Eritrea, 23 April 1999.

ADDIS ABABA AND CENTRAL OROMIA REGION

Killings

Dachassa Jirru Gobanna, lawyer and legal advisor, was shot dead by a police chief in Adama [Nazaret], E. Showa, on 21 January. He was Attorney General for Adama, 1993-5, and for Adama and Bishoftu District in 1996, until sacked along with 85 other Oromo Attorney Generals accused of sympathising with the OLF. He was detained for three months (January – March) and two months (July – August) in 1998, at Adama Central Police Station.

At 1.30 p.m. on 22 January 1999, he was shot five times by Corporal Tolesa Megersa, Chief of Police, Akaki District Police Station, on the porch of a film processing shop, opposite the Ethiopian Light and Power Authority office. He was hit in the chest and arm with the first three shots and cried for assistance, but the assailant stood on his feet and shot him twice again, killing him. Corporal Tolesa then went to Adama District Police Station saying he killed Dachassa after being insulted by him.

Dheressa Abashu, a lawyer in Jibat Mecha, Dandi sub-district, near Chilimo, was shot dead by government forces at his compound, in daylight on 1 April.

Clandestine Human Rights Group A, Addis Ababa, February 1999.

Death from torture, fifteen more Oromo prisoners of conscience transferred to dark underground cells in Maikelawi

Among the 65 Oromo members of cultural and human rights organisations, doctors, nurses and journalists facing conspiracy charges in Addis Ababa, 15 more have been transferred from Karchale central prison to underground cells in Maikelawi Special Investigation Centre, according to information received by OSG on 12 May and 2 June.

Kumulaa Wolde-Sambat, a 68 year old man from Qaaranaa Awwaaree Peasant Association, Ambo, W. Showa, died in Karchale on 30 March, just before the transfer. He had bowel complications following torture with metal and wooden objects being forced into his anus. He was denied medical access in Karchale.

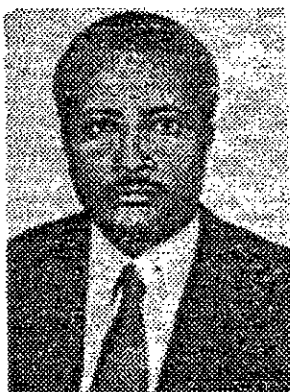
Those who were transferred at the end of March joined journalist, **Solomon Namarra**, and Human Rights League and Macha-Tulama Association board member, **Gabissa Lamessa**, who were transferred in December 1998. They also met with **Suutee Baarentoo**, a musician from the *Bilisummaa Band*, who has been detained for many months, and in shackles for over five months, in Maikelawi.

Dr. **Gizaw Erana Gojjam** has been held in solitary confinement from mid-January 1999. Like **Gabissa Lamessa** he is being kept in a dark room for 24 hours per day and is held *incommunicado*.

Detainees, including prisoners of conscience according to Amnesty International, went on hunger strike in protest at continued use of shackles on prisoners. There is continual postponement of court hearings and Oromo detainees are singled out as the only ones in Karchale who are not allowed to speak in their native language, to each other or to visitors. Tigrigna, Kambata, Hadiya, Sidama and, of course, Amharic are spoken in Karchale; but not Afaan Oromoo. Husband and wife are being forced to speak to each other in Amharic for the first time in their lives.

Since the Dergue administration, Karchale prison has changed. It is now divided into blocks to prevent communication. No writing or education is allowed. The library has been closed. The Afaan Oromoo version of the Bible is not allowed into the prison.

The response of government prison authorities to the hunger strike was to transfer 15 of the detainees to Maikelawi, where they were subject to torture. Although access has been denied to relatives, it has been reported that some were taken to a hospital in the capital for treatment for wounds sustained while being tortured. **Shiferaw Biru**, an elder among the 65, was reported to have been unconscious following torture.



Beyene Belissa

There is a fear that denial of medical access to detainees will lead to further deaths. **Beyene Belissa**, an amputee, is having difficulty reaching toilet facilities because his artificial leg has again been confiscated. In April, he was reported to be seriously ill, having spent three days in the prison clinic. Prisoners who act as staff in the clinic have repeatedly requested hospital treatment for him, but requests have been ignored.

OSG has been informed separately on three occasions that publicity about detainees, visits by well-meaning western diplomats and support letters from abroad are followed by an increase in the beatings, harassment and mistreatment of the detainees.

Disappearance

Tawaji Shuna Gojjamo is a 38 year old father of three and former head of maintenance at Adama (Nazaret) hospital in S. Showa. He fled to Kenya in December 1998 following an attempt by government security agents to arrest him. He denies having any role with the OLF, however. His brother and wife were detained following his escape, and his wife is said to be still in detention. In Kenya he developed a malignant tumour in his neck, reputed to be due to 'blood cancer', and decided to go back home for palliative care.

He was abducted from the street and detained in Awassa, just over the border in Sidamo province, on 19 May and was reported seen in the police station there the following day. Since then his whereabouts are unknown. In view of his medical condition, his family are anxious that he be traced as soon as possible and given medical care.

Letter and email from close relatives in USA, 23 and 25 May 1999.

Imprisonment and torture

Harsh sentences, from 3 – 20 years hard labour, were passed on 21 co-defendants of Professor Asrat Woldeyes, on 31 March, by the Federal High Court in Addis Ababa, because of their roles in the All Amhara Peoples Organisation.

Thirteen are known to have been tortured, Major Mikre Tekle (sentenced 20 yrs), Capt. Mikresellassie Woldemariam (18 yrs), Capt. Alemneh Metreyes (15 yrs), 2nd Lieut. Wondim Defere (15 yrs), 2nd Lieut. Ababayehu Bekele, Pte. Zegeye Habtewolde, Pte. Shewa'afere Gebrewold (in chains for over one year) and Dawit Tegegne (each sentenced 10 yrs), Negusse Fikre, Girma Nega (lost two teeth during torture), Mamushet Amare, Zewde Teferra and Libey Abebe (8 yrs) and Adam Badeg (3 yrs).

Others sentenced to 4 - 6 years, but not reported to have been tortured, are Wondayehu Kassa, Ali Indris Negash, Assefa Negash, Yigebawal Taye, Berihun Shibeshi, Girma Inqusellassie, Asseggedech Shewangizaw and Serkalem Dagnachew.

Ethiopian Register, Avon, Minnesota, USA, 6, 5, May 1999

Osman Nuri, a 25 yr old student at Jimma Teachers Training College, wrote from exile on 2 June, '*In 1993 I was detained in Assela Military Barracks [Arsi province] . . . for five months. In detention I was tortured cruelly . . . The EPRDF security personnel forced me to tell them about the relationship of my father and elder brothers with the OLF. . . . In 1996, I was re-detained with all my family, including my father, in Assela for two months. I was transferred to Adama (Nazaret), [E. Showa] Military Barracks with my father and detained for seven months. . . . [where] due to torture, my father, lost one eye and two teeth. . . .*

When I was released from detention, they gave me strong warning and told me to report to the EPRDF office weekly. . . .

. . . After the death of my second brother [November, 1998, see below, Western Oromia, Killings], the EPRDF security personnel came to the college to detain me . . .'

He then fled into exile. He wrote that his father remains in detention.

Woldemikael Beriso Guraro, who ran a licensed pharmacy in Adama, E. Showa, wrote from exile in May, about how he was held in an underground cell in Kasa Inchis, Addis Ababa, for 3 months in 1992. He was abducted from Adama in 1996 and was lost to his family, i.e. 'disappeared', until being found in Maikelawi Special investigation Centre in Addis, in 1997, to where he is believed to have been transferred from Zeway, S. Showa. He was a well known and wealthy businessman, suspected of funding the OLF.

EASTERN OROMIA REGION

Disappearances

Mohammed Wado Obaa, from Goba, Bale, and his son, **Abdallah Mohammed Wado**, were taken from their home on 20 August 1992, since when their location has been unknown. Abdallah's brother wrote from exile on 6 June that they were taken in reprisal for his escaping from detention. It is not known whether they are alive or dead.

A. Bakri, from E. Hararge, was reported by his son (see M. A. Bakri, below) to have been detained with him in Grawa military camp in January 1993. Whereas his son was released after two years, A. Bakri was not, and his whereabouts are unknown.

Imprisonment, rape and torture

Kadir Mohammed Wado, wrote from exile, telling of his detention and torture for one month at Agarfa, north of Goba, Bale province, after the OLF withdrew from the transitional government in 1992. Methods of torture which he describes have not changed much (see below): *'I was frightened at gunpoint and dipped into a cold water barrel for many days. I was tied, my hands behind my back, and tortured with electric wire on the soles of my feet. They fired a gun near my ears, causing deafness.'* Following his escape, government forces detained his father and brother – causing them to 'disappear' (see above).

Shanu Gishe Buta told a similar tale of familial persecution from his exile, on 2 June. He was detained in Koffele, a town near his village in Arsi province, from 25 September 1992 to 2 October 1993. He moved to Harar, E. Hararge, where he was again detained, from 4 March to 4 June 1996. He had to report twice daily to the TPLF office in Harar city. After the bombings in Harar in August 1997, government troops went to his house to arrest him, but finding him not at home, abducted and detained his wife.

Jewar Adem wrote from exile about the closure of the Oromo Relief Association (ORA) office in Bale province. *'In January 1995, our office was closed, our properties and official documents were confiscated by government soldiers while we were in the field to distribute food rations to the hungry and drought-affected people. During this period, government armed security men opened fire on us, while we were working. One of our colleagues was shot dead when he tried to escape.'*

Abdela Mohamed Yusuf wrote to OSG from exile, on 12 May. He is a 26 yr old businessman, restaurateur and father of two from Qobbo town, Hararge province. Torture methods and familial abuse are frequently recorded by OSG. Eye-witnesses of rape rarely report the incident.

He describes how merchants and wealthy businessmen, like himself, were targeted by government forces because they were suspected of funding the OLF. He was detained soon after the OLF were pushed out of the transitional government, from June - September 1992. He describes being beaten and threatened with a gun by his ear. After release, his movements were restricted until his re-arrest on 17 November 1995.

'I was arrested by EPRDF security armed forces and taken to the big Qobbo underground cell. They put a piece of cloth in my mouth, in order not to shout. They tied my hands tightly with rope

and hung me upside down, beating me ruthlessly. I suffered severe kicks to my private parts. I was kicked with boots and when I started getting too weak they suspended me on a hinge as I regained my consciousness.'

He was released on 24 April 1997 but after two soldiers were shot near his restaurant on 10 October, he and his wife were taken to 'one of the military torture centres, known as Qobbo'.

'In this prison, I witnessed men raping my wife in front of my eyes, and was beaten until unconscious.'

He was tortured to admit he was hiding weapons in his house. The methods are familiar.

He was suspended upside down with hands and legs tied behind his back with wire; a cloth in his mouth, while soles of his feet were beaten; immersed in cold water; hot electric water heater applied to his back; a bottle of water hung from his genitalia for 2 hours; threats with guns and knives.

After two weeks at the hands of drunken torturers, he told them there were weapons hidden in his house, to get a break from torture.

His roof was removed and grounds dug up in vain efforts to find weapons. His savings (70,000 Birr) were stolen, as was his restaurant. He was transferred to a confiscated warehouse used as a prison; it had belonged to his uncle. After one week, his brother was brought in. He was forced to hear the screams of his brother while he was tortured.

He remained in detention until escaping in January 1999.

M. A. Bakri, a 24 yr old businessman from E. Hararge (few details are given, to safeguard his family), wrote of identical torture methods being used on him during his detentions in underground cells in Grawa military camp, January 1993, for two years; in underground cells at Harar military camp, May – October 1996; and in Addele military camp from July 1998 until February 1999. He has incontinence of urine, as does Abdela Mohamed Yusuf [see above], after the water suspension torture.

Like Abdela, he was targeted because of being a businessman.

Abdi Abraham Ahmed, 27 yr old father of two, from Kombolcha, E. Hararge, was another businessman who eventually lost all his property. He wrote from exile on 16 April. His account of his first arrest is familiar.

'In July 1992, . . . at midnight my house was raided by TPLF security men. When they came to the house, they knocked but did not wait before breaking the door and coming inside. They mishandled me and pushed me to the ground, and then tied both my hands together behind my back and I was taken to Kombolcha military camp. On the way, I was brutally beaten with a rubber whip and gun butts, kicked and hit with fists and sticks. This was followed by bitter torture.'

He was released on 5,000 Birr bond after 5 months and eventually began life again, as a driver for his uncle. After local OLF activity in January 1995, he was taken during a wave of arrests around Kombolcha. He was kept in a tiny cell in Kombolcha police station. He was made to 'bear a heavy stone on my head and beaten with plastic rope and electric wire'.

'I was taken to a nearby hill . . . many of my friends were shot dead in front of my own eyes'. This has commonly been reported from detainees in Kombolcha. He was released, sick from torture, after signing 'on my life to be killed if I was found moving from my home area and not to involve myself with OLF activities'.

Again after local fighting with the OLF, government security men took him from his home at midnight, 5 August 1998, and took him to the military camp. While there, he underwent immersion in cold water, 'they tied a scissor like material on my private parts', and had all property confiscated. He escaped with others during an OLF attack on the camp.

As well as the incontinence often reported after genital torture, he is now partially paralysed and mentally and physically ill.

Erbo Wolie Seta, a wealthy businessman working in import and export of agricultural goods, from Dodola, Bale, wrote on 21 May that he was first detained on 1 January 1992, when the OLF were still in the transitional government. He was taken to Dodola camp, transferred after a few days to Goba and, one day later, to Awassa, at the northern tip of Sidamo province. He was robbed of 15,552 Birr.

He was held in the office of General Hayalom Ariaya, at Southern Regional Military Headquarters in Awassa. While in his office, *'I was bitterly tortured, inserted in cold water, they adjusted electricity against me, and the like'*. This continued for five days before he was sent to the military camp in Awassa, where he spent several months, and then Bilate camp, established for OLF sympathisers once the OLF left government, in June 1992. In Bilate, he had *'much more torture than before'*, until released on 12 December.

In February 1994, he was detained at Malka Wakana, Bale, until 10 April 1997. *'I have seen Oromo thrown into deepest valley, handicapped, blind and others.'* OSG has received several reports of Oromo being thrown down a gorge at the Hydro-Electric station in Malka Wakana.

His shop, car, flour machines and store rooms, worth approaching 1 million Birr, have been confiscated.

Mohammed Abdulahi Genamo, a driver from Adaba in northeast Bale, was also detained, with his mother and brothers, in Malka Wakana military camp, for 10 months in 1994. He was also shown dead bodies, immersed in cold water and only released after signing that he would be killed if disobedient.

He was sought following OLF activity around Adaba and moved over the provincial border with Showa, to Shashemane. In 1998, he was again detained, this time in Zeway, a camp notorious for torture, in S. Showa. He remained there for five months, experiencing torture *'much worse than before'* in underground cells. He escaped. In reprisal, government forces arrested his wife and mother and stole his car, television and 10,000 Birr from his home. His sister, **Shamsiya Abdulahi**, subsequently died. His father, **Abdulahi Genamo**, and his brother, **Ahmed Abdulahi**, have disappeared.

Letter from victim, 25 May 1999

WESTERN OROMIA REGION

Killings

Hussein Nuri and **Roba Genemo** were shot dead by government security men in Jimma, now in Illubabor province, in January 1996. Hussein Nuri's younger brother reported the incident from exile on 2 June 1999. He also wrote that another older brother of his was similarly killed in November 1998.

Imprisonment

Zakir Sherafudin Hussein, from Bore Tino village, Limmu, Jimma, was detained for 5 months from August 1995, and was re-arrested shortly after release. He is still being held without charge or court appearance, in Jimma prison. His crime was to have worked with the OLF when they partook in the transitional government. His family are without support.

Correspondence from contacts in Union of Oromo Students in Europe, Germany, 13 June 1999

SOUTHERN OROMIA REGION

Imprisonment and torture

Waqo Malicha Kontoma, a 33 yr old teacher from Mega, Borana, wrote on 31 May. His story is typical of those innocent people who supported the OLF when it was legally representing the Oromo people in the transitional government between 1991 and 1992, but who have had no contact with the OLF since then.

He wrote, '*On 20 July 1992, five Ethiopian security men raided my home and took me to Mega police station. They beat me for ten consecutive days, handcuffed me and interrogated me . . . They tortured me by twisting my hands and legs together at the back and drove me into the bush threatening [me] with death, in case I would not confess to their fabricated charges against me.*'

He was transferred to Didessa concentration camp, until released after paying 5,000 Birr, in February 1994.

'*On 5 August 1995, four armed soldiers abducted and took me to Bokkulu Boma military camp and detained me in an underground cell . . . threatened to be shot should I ever dare to support rebels.*' He was released, after paying 8,000 Birr, on 12 June 1996.

'*On 5 June 1998 three government security men came to my house and took me to Mega military camp and kept me in solitary confinement in dark room and tortured me as before.*'

He lists the torture methods to which he was subjected.

1. *They took me out at night to a nearby forest, tied my hands and legs together at the back, with a chain and closed my mouth with a towel to prevent me crying for help.*
2. *They put a big stone under my chest, beat and kicked me with their boots on my back, head, stomach and on my private parts till I became unconscious.*
3. *They aimed a gun at my forehead, put it into my mouth and shooting it close to my ears, threatening to kill me if I would not tell them the supporters of the OLF.*
4. *They beat me with a club on my back, kidneys and chest.*
5. *They put a sword on my neck, threatening to kill me if I would not accept their charges against me.*
6. *They pressed my testicles with pliers until I became unconscious.*
7. *They hung a bottle of water on my testicles and forced me to stand until I fainted.*
8. *They dug a deep pit and buried me up to my neck . . . they brought some kind of termites which bit my head, ears and nose, which I could not . . . [keep away] . . . from my head, ears, eyes and nose, since my hands were buried.*
9. *They tied my hands and legs together and laid me in a deep pit, carrying spades, threatening to bury me alive . . .*
10. *I was forced to sit in the hot sun and look directly at the sun for a long time.*

All his property was looted by soldiers and he was sacked. On release, on 23 October 1998, he was ordered to report every week and stay in Mega town.

According to a letter received by OSG on 14 June, two escapees from Moyale military camp have reported that the following 34 were among detainees there. Ten of those named have been transferred to an unknown destination, i.e. potentially **disappeared**:

Ustad Ahimed Bahimud	Aba Nura
Chiro Adaro Mohammed	Ahimad Abdala
Tadicha Boru	Bonaya Boru
Shukur Abubakar Aman	Mohammed Nur Aman
Abdulatif Hussen	Jibril Hussen
Abdala Dhaqabo Boru	Mohammed Kalil Aman
Kadir Haji Sanba	Birhanu Legesse
Ware Hasano	Jilo Qoncaro
Haro Hussen Dado	Nasir Hasan
Hamzam Aliyi Tola	Adan Alake
Mohammed Hussen Haji Hajole	Abdala Aliye
Shukur Usen Eda'o	Kadir Hebbu
Lahira Waaqo	Abdullahi Mamiyo Galato
Darku Hasano	Aman Ahimed
Mohammed Korso	Suleyman Hussen
Hussen Waqo Dale	Jamal Hussen
Hunde (father's name not known)	Abdalla (father's name not known)

The correspondent also reported that another camp in Moyale, known locally as '127' holds an unknown number of Oromo in secret detention. There are a growing number of secret detention centres in Borana, since OLF activity in the province.

Over 500 people, who were arrested in August, 1998, after clashes between the two communities of Gedeo and Oromo, remain in detention. The original places of detention are given below. However, many of them have been moved.

The list includes 79 names of Oromo initially detained at Hagare Mariam Senior High School and Hagare Mariam Military camp, Borana. They are held without warrant or trial and with no family contacts. Most are breadwinners and many are civil servants.

Detainees in Hagare Mariam High School:

Abera Idosa	Gatu Abera
Edema Galga	Amente Berkessa
Bogale Kasaye	Gamade Dube
Miju Lutto	Zelege Dima
Elias Miju	Moges Dima
Gonfa Olkaba	Yohannis Dube
Abera Bogale	Israel Araree
Gololcha Idossa	Shiferaw Olkaba
Messele Basaye	Dido Tukke

Birhanu Wayyu
Tessema Kobbo
Guyya Galchu
Safaye Galchu
Abdissa Olkaba
Shimalis Tesfaye
Tibe Shuma Geda
Bati Gumi
Ture Kutal
Sharif Yisihak
Lemma Ofsa
Abraham Boko
Teshome Dulacha
Wondimagengahu Bayeta
Kadir Shuhu
Idossa Jaldessa
Ammadin Haji Kuta
Sheik Aliye (father's name unknown)
Mohamed Bedane
Haro Bati

Mohamed Jilo
Alemu Dima
Eshetu Jaldassa
Haro Bassaye
Wondimu Kifle
Endashu Merkabu
Gabre Robi
Ashebir Robi
Ayele Robi
Ayele Dejene
Nigusu Galchu
Zelege Galchu
Mekuria Edossa
Bihon Miju
Melese Bihon
Zemach Bihon
Getachew Salsa
Teramaj Belachew
Bedada Guye

Detainees in a single room at Hagare Mariam Military camp:

Utukana Malo
Katelo Galgalo
Adale Elma
Dedacha Wachu
Nura Oda
Dako Kito
Ayele Safaye
Shitisa Teki
Amenu Assefa
Abdulahi Waji
Liban (father's name unknown)

Lema (District Secretary)
Major (District Chief of police)
Dabaso Buya
Sorsa (father's name unknown)
Assefa Keda
Abraham Ware
Tages Haile
Milkias Busawo
Mulatu Basheru
Ware Basaye
Tokke Wako

Clandestine Human Rights Group A, Addis Ababa, February 1999.

JOURNALISTS IN DETENTION

At the end of 1998, the Committee to Protect Journalists wrote in its country report on Ethiopia, *'Incarceration has long been Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's punishment of choice for journalists, so it was not surprising that Ethiopia once again led Africa in the number of journalists in prison at the end of the year – or that Meles again earned a place among CPJ's 10 Worst Enemies of the Press. Repeated crackdowns on the independent media throughout the year testified to a repressive environment that is expected to deteriorate even more as Ethiopia and Eritrea spar on the brink of a full-scale war.'*

Although Meles has argued that press freedom threatens democracy because the media could incite ethnic hatred, his treatment of the press reveals his own antidemocratic impulses. For example, on July 13, **Shimelis Kemal**, **Berhanu Negash** and **Teferi Mekonnen**, editors of the independent newspaper Nishan, were arrested in Addis Ababa after the publication of an article warning against ethnic intolerance toward Eritreans. They were released the next day, but were arrested again on July 15 and remained in detention for more than three months after they issued a statement criticising their initial arrest.

The report goes on to criticise the vague Press Laws under which journalists are detained.

Zealous prosecutors and a compliant judiciary perpetuate a system that cycles journalists through the country's prisons on ad hoc charges or often no charges at all. Because the bail and fines imposed on journalists are prohibitive, they often languish behind bars.

Newspapers and magazines must register with the Ministry of Information . . . and reporters must also register with the ministry. The state continues to control all broadcast media.

Ethiopia's dubious distinction of imprisoning the greatest number of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa for all but one of the past five years has had a severe impact on the country's journalists, causing many to leave the profession. For those who remain and persevere in their profession, imprisonment has sometimes proven fatal: In February, **Abay Hailu**, editor of Wolafen, died after prison authorities denied him medical treatment for a serious ailment.

Twenty one episodes of detention during 1998 were listed by the organisation, and 7 episodes of harassment.

According to the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association report to the International Federation of Journalists in Brussels, as of 4 June 1999, twelve journalists remain in detention.

Wondewesen Asfaw, *Atkurot*, since March 1997

Zemedkun Moges, since March 1997

Samson Seyoum, *Goh* and *Tequamí*, since 18 April 1997 (since December 1995, according to Reporters sans Frontieres)

Garoma Bekele, *URJII*, since October 1997

Tesfaye Deressa, *URJII*, since October 1997

Solomon Namarra, *URJII*, since October 1997

Tamrat Gemedá, since October 1997

Tilahun Bekele, *Fetash*, since December 1997 (September 1998, according to CPJ)

Tesfa Tegegne, *Beza*, since March 1998

Fisseha Alemu, *Tarik*, since March 1998

Tesahlene Mengesha, since 5 March 1999

Abera Weggi, since 27 May 1999

Moti Biyya, a political analyst and journalist for *URJII*, detained since September 1997, was not mentioned in the above reports.

Alemu Tolassa, another *URJII* journalist, acting Editor in Chief when the newspaper was closed down after the others were detained, is also detained since November 1997.

OSG's informants say that Moti Biyya's case may be heard in Jimma, Oromia Region. It is not known where he is being held. Alemu Tolassa is believed to be held somewhere in Addis Ababa.

REFUGEE UPDATE

Djibouti

Two Oromo were detained before a meeting between Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, and Ismael Omar Guelleh, the new President of Djibouti, at Guelleh's inauguration ceremony on 10 April. They were released, but re-arrested along with at least 19 others in the next day or two. Twenty one remained in detention by 27 May, according to a press release from the Oromo Relief Association (ORA), London. Those without UNHCR protection (at least 19) are believed by the Oromo community in Djibouti to be in danger of *refoulement*. According to a recent ORA newsletter, over 25,000 Oromo live in Djibouti town. Very few are under official UNHCR protection.

The current detainees are believed to be held in the 3rd Police Commissariat.

On 28 May, OSG received news from Djibouti that Oromo are being 'hunted' by Djibouti security forces and that at least two detainees are being tortured because of refusing to give information about those who are being sought.

Ibrahim Mohammed Osman and **Ali Mussa** were reported from Djibouti to be in a 'weak condition' following beating and torture. UNHCR has acknowledged the detention only of Ibrahim Mohammed Osman, who has mandate refugee status. They reported his transfer to custody in UNHCR's Nagad camp, as of 9 June.

Names of others detained as of 28 May are:

Sheik Abdella Jibril

Ali Mohammed (Sagir)

Abdi Mohammed Shirbo

Ms Amina Amma

Mohammed Oumer Osman

Heydrus (Abdella) Abdullahi

Jafar (Mohammed) Sharifa

Elias Mohammed Ahmed

An unknown number of refugees were moved from Oboka to Gadade, according to ORA's sources.

Fifteen Djibouti citizens were arrested after a group of youngsters went on a violent rampage beginning 22 May, beating and seriously injuring Oromo and other refugees. One source claims that an Oromo was killed and 20 wounded at Aron, 15 wounded at Gadade and 7 at Ambuli. The killing has not been confirmed by other sources, but there are corroborative reports of many serious injuries. An appeal by the new Minister of the Interior was broadcast on 31 May, since when the violence has reduced.

Kenya

One year ago, there were 20,000 Oromo refugees in Nairobi and in UNHCR's Kakuma camp, about 1000 km. to the north. Since the Ethio-Eritrean war flared up in February, up to 150 youngsters have been arriving in Nairobi every day, avoiding forced conscription. Many others continue to arrive, having escaped or been released from detention and torture.

Life is harsh in Kakuma, especially for the many who report suffering from the psychological and physical effects of torture. OSG has received over sixteen separate reports from Oromo refugees,

stating that Ethiopian government agents, operating under the co-ordination of the embassy in Nairobi, are encouraging other refugees in Kakuma against Oromo refugees there.

Many Oromo in Kakuma have been 'injured and found in hospital'. In 1998, the Oromo Community committee were fired upon and their property confiscated by Ethiopian government agents, according to reports from Kakuma. One refugee reports being detained by Kenyan police at Kakuma for 48 hrs following the incident. In April this year, Oromo community members were attacked at night. One, **Mohammed Aman Abdurahman**, lost teeth in the assault. There have been several attempts to kill individuals, often by setting fire to their huts. Many have gone into hiding, usually in Nairobi, where they are hardly more secure.

Tigrean agents from the embassy, or Kenyans or ex-Dergue functionaries hired by them, have abducted and beaten Oromo in Nairobi. A student received written threats before separate attempts were made to abduct him by car and to kill him. An attempt on the life of another refugee occurred on 30 March and he spent one week in hospital, according to his letter. Another refugee, a father of six, was wounded by knife and gunshot on 10 April, and had to be hospitalised. One man reported (26 April) three attempts on his life in Nairobi, on 6 December 1998, and 12 and 14 January 1999. Another wrote, '*I constantly change my residence for fear of TPLF security men who are hunting me day and night to either kill or hijack me*'. Names have been withheld by OSG, to protect victims and their relatives in Oromia. See Urgent Action.

Three Boran Oromo, **Hussein Tuula**, **Biru Dida** and **Bonaya Diimaa**, from the Ethiopian side of the border town of Moyale, were arrested on the Kenyan side of the town ten months ago. They were detained in Nyeri prison, north of Nairobi, after briefly being held in Isiolo. They are due to be released imminently. They expect to be forcibly repatriated to Ethiopia unless UNHCR can insist on protecting them.

Oromo refugees in Kenya wrote protest letters to UNHCR in March, complaining about the appointment of a Tigrean, Tschaye Jakob, as a community social service worker in Nairobi. They believe he is a TPLF, Ethiopian government, agent who will use his position to read confidential files of Oromo refugees and lead the embassy to them.

Sudan

Thousands of Oromo have recently crossed the border at Gedaref in north-east Sudan, according to ORA.

The abduction and deportation of the pastor of the Khartoum Oromo Church, Gullumaa Beenyaa, reported in *Sagalee Haaraa* and Press Release No. 27, is untrue according to recent information. However, OSG received a report from Khartoum on 29 April that Ethiopian government security agents were operating in Sudan, independently and via co-operative elements within Sudan's security service.

Birasa Wakjira, a refugee at Awad Asiid camp, was beaten by Sudanese security men in 1998 'until he became faint and was thrown into a field' needing hospitalisation in Sinja.

Fekadu Wadajo, a refugee in Damazine, died this year when he was run over by a car driven by Sudanese security men, deliberately, according to observers.

Hussein Worku and **Mustafa Said Mohammed**, refugees in Khartoum, were attacked, and shot by presumed agents of the Ethiopian government in separate incidents in 1998. Hussein Worku was attacked in his home.

Dagaga Bayissa, was abducted by 'an organised group' in Sennar, on 6 March 1999. His arms were tied behind his back and he was 'immersed in cold water'.

Denmark

Two young men, who were detained in Ethiopia for being political cadres of the OLF, when part of the transitional government, sought asylum in Denmark in 1998. [Names withheld by OSG.] They have lost colleagues, relatives and friends and have good reason to fear returning to Ethiopia. The Danish authorities denied them asylum. One was ordered to leave the country on 4 March, the other on 3 May. Both have been told that the Danish police will forcibly repatriate them to Ethiopia. See Urgent Action.

Germany

Germany now has finally rejected asylum application from at least six Oromo refugees. One has been in prison since March 1998, because he resisted deportation. At least four have been forced to sign application papers to legalise their transport back to Ethiopia, although none have been sent back since September 1998. Many others have had their first applications for asylum refused. Isolation in cramped detention centres, harassment by police, prevention of work or study and not even enough money to subsist on, have contributed to the great fear and insecurity of refugees in Germany.

A young Sudanese man was recently sent back to Sudan against his will. German security staff had to subdue him to get him on the plane. He had died by the time the plane reached Khartoum, according to information OSG received from Germany.

Britain

Adagne GebreMariam Agena, from Gamogofa, Southern Peoples Region, was detained at Heathrow airport on 2 March, when he applied for asylum. A 'Refugee Arrival Project' solicitor saw him briefly, but he had no chance to tell his full story. He was transferred to Haslar prison on 17 March and deported to Germany (where he studied until going back to Ethiopia in 1998) within a few days. Friends tried desperately to contact him and his legal 'support', but there was no response to messages left. It is not known what his fate was in Germany.

Abbreviations

CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (government party; umbrella group led by TPLF)
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation (government Oromo party)
ORA	Oromo Relief Association
OSG	Oromia Support Group
TPLF	Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (dominant party in government)
UNHCR	U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees