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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 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 2,857 extra-judicial killings and 853 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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## **EASTERN OROMIA REGION**

### **Detention**

**Asnake Dejene**, a 51 year old who had worked for the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority for 22 years, wrote from Kenya on 4 February.

He was detained from 1996 to May 2001 in Dire Dawa, E. Hararge. He wrote 'After my release, I tried to return to my previous job. But the security of Wayane [TPLF – government security] didn't allow me.' He was ordered to keep clear of the office compound and was closely watched as he moved from place to place. He escaped with his family to Kenya, where he is seeking protection from UNHCR.

## **SOUTHERN OROMIA REGION**

### **Schoolchildren shot in Moyale**

Local informants have sent detailed reports of the shooting by government soldiers, on 21 January, of youngsters attending the Somare primary school, 8 km northwest of the border town of Moyale, Borana zone.

*Voice of America* radio reported the shootings on 2 February. Ensuing civil unrest and the closure of the border was reported by both the Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation and the UN news network, IRIN.

The schoolchildren were living in a hostel which was paid for by donations from local Borana pastoralists and a 1984 government grant. When TPLF troops commandeered the building and ordered the children out, they quelled the protest which followed by opening fire on the children, wounding at least ten. Several were reported to have received life-threatening wounds, including Jarso Anna, Galgalo Galma and Adan Mohammed Goje.

The victims' parents were prevented by Ethiopian soldiers from taking their wounded children to the hospital, on the Kenyan side of Moyale.

High school students boycotted lessons and there was rioting, according to one local report. Approaches to the school and hostel were closed and the school was occupied by troops from 21 to 25 January. Soldiers closed the border with Kenya. Cross border trade was halted for at least one week. One sorghum trader was shot and another wounded when they tried to cross, according to one report.

There was a heavy presence of TPLF troops 'from Arballe to the North and Godaa Guda to the South'. Ethiopian soldiers crossed over into Kenya, but were said by local MP, Dr Guracha Galgalo, to have left Kenyan soil by 4 February.

The fate of the wounded children is not known.

One informant, a Borana Oromo, concluded 'the TPLF soldiers have been killing, arresting, confiscating the Oromo people of the area since they seized power. Whenever there is a clash between the Oromo and any other tribe, the

TPLF soldiers sided with the other side and killed the Oromo people. For example, the clash[es] between Borana Oromo and Garre, Gedeo and Guji, etc.'

## PRESS

According to the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association, Addis Ababa, in a report on 28 January, **Zekarias Tesfaye**, the publisher of *Netsanet*, an Amharic private weekly newspaper, was arrested and detained by plain clothes police and security officers while having lunch with friends at a hotel, on 25 January. He was taken to Maikelawi Special Investigation Centre, from where he was released that evening, after bail of 5000 Birr was paid. He was accused of fabricating a defamatory article about tycoon Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi.

On 1 February, the Paris-based, Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) called on members of Eritrea's National Assembly, which began on 29 January, to release all independent journalists. The eight journalists who were detained in September 2001 are **Yusuf Mohammed Ali** (*Tsigenay* editor-in-chief), **Mateos Habteab** (*Meqaleh* editor-in-chief), **Dawit Isaac** and **Tsehaye Yohannes** (*Setit* journalists), **Temesgen Gebreyesus** and **Medhanie Haile** (*Keste Debena* assistant chief editor and board member), **Emanuel Asrat** (*Zemen*) and independent photographer, **Seyoum Fsehay**.

The eight were being held in No. 1 Police Station in Asmara. RSF also expressed concern about six other journalists who 'are believed to have either been imprisoned or to have gone into hiding to escape arrest' - **Zemenfes Haile** and **Ghebrehiwet Keleta** (*Tsigenay*), **Selamynges Beyene** (*Meqaleh*), **Simret Seyoum** and **Aaron Berhane** (*Setit*), and **Said Abdulkader** (*Admas*).

## ARTISTS

A group of exiled Oromo performing artists wrote to OSG from exile in Kenya on 28 January. They listed the names of artists who had been killed, detained or driven into exile by previous regimes in Ethiopia, as well as by the current regime. Whereas the Haile Selassie administration assassinated Abdullahi Arsi (folk singer) and Ayub Abubaker (journalist and poet) while they were in Somalia, the Derg military dictatorship killed Abubaker Musa (writer and dramatist, killed in Hararge), Mustafa Abdi (folk singer, buried alive with 29 other refugees who were deported from Somalia, 1990) and Ahmed Kebira (folk singer, assassinated in Somalia in the late 1980s).

The Derg regime forced at least ten singers and other artists into exile.

The current EPRDF government of Ethiopia has arrested hundreds of people for distributing and selling Oromo music cassettes, according to the artists themselves and according to OSG's records.

Oromo artists who have been killed by the current regime include:

<b>Ebbisa Addunya</b>	singer and guitarist, Bilisuma Band, shot dead in Addis Ababa, August 1996 (previously reported by OSG)
<b>Hime Yusuf</b>	singer and musician, Chafe Gada Band, killed in Hararge 1997
<b>Kulani Boru</b>	female vocalist, Chafe Gada Band, Hararge 1997
<b>Bonsiso Challa</b>	singer, Chafe Gada Band, Hararge 1992
<b>Hordofa Barento</b>	traditional dancer, Chafe Gada Band, Hararge 1992
<b>Jalal</b>	drama producer, Chafe Gada Band, Hararge 1992
<b>Sabontu Barentu</b>	female vocalist, Chafe Gada Band, Bale 1997
<b>Ayantu Borana</b>	female traditional dancer, Chafe Gada Band, Bale 1997

Artists who have disappeared since the present regime came to power include:

<b>Jirenya Ayana</b>	singer, Gada Band, Addis Ababa 1996
<b>Basha Hussein</b>	female traditional dancer, Bilisuma Band, Addis Ababa 1999
<b>Fufa Duguma</b>	poet, Addis Ababa 1997
<b>Darartu Bona</b>	female vocalist, Bale 1997
<b>Abdulkhakim (Shefis)</b>	singer, Chafe Gada Band, Bale 1997
<b>Adem Wake</b>	singer, Addis Ababa 1997

The artists name two singers from the Bilisuma Band who have been detained and mistreated in Addis Ababa since 1996, **Usmayo Musa** and **Sute Barento**. Usmayo's wife died after he was detained and there is no-one to care for his three children.

At least 19 performers have fled to the west:

<b>Ali Shabo</b>	<b>Qurquje Simbo</b>
<b>Dagim Mokonon</b>	<b>Bashir Dabi</b>
<b>Totoba Taddasse</b>	<b>Yohannis Abata</b>
<b>Shole Tefera</b>	<b>Muktar Usman</b>
<b>Mohammed Sheka</b>	<b>Tuji mudde</b>
<b>Ifinesh Kano</b>	<b>Ababa Abishu</b>
<b>Umar Suleyman</b>	<b>Shabe Sheko F</b>
<b>Hailu Kitaba</b>	<b>Dawit Makonnin</b>
<b>Hirpa Ganfure</b>	<b>Mahadi Jabon</b>
<b>Boharsitu Obsa</b>	

At least 17 are seeking resettlement from surrounding countries in the Horn, especially Kenya. These include the authors of the report:

<b>Bakalcha Yahya</b>	poet, stage manager and editor of <i>Coqorsa</i> magazine, leader of Bilisuma Band
<b>Kasim Adam</b>	singer, songwriter, Gada Band

<b>Kumala Adugna</b>	poet and singer, Gada and Bilisuma Bands
<b>Hashim Aliyi</b>	poet and singer, Bilisuma Band
<b>Hangatu Balcha</b>	actress and singer, Bilisuma Band
<b>Dagne Dafersha</b>	playwright, actor, dancer, Gada and Bilisuma Bands
<b>Mohammed Kedir</b>	songwriter, dancer and singer, Gada Band
<b>Juneydi Abdulrashid</b>	singer, songwriter and musician

Other artists in Kenya include:

**Kedir Sa'id**  
**Gamachiftu Urfo**  
**Dirirsa Elemo**  
**Talile Barento**  
**Abdo Nawe**  
**Bikila Guyuta'a**  
**Futabiher Gudina**  
**Mussa Turki**  
**Adem Harun**  
**Challa Charchar**

## **KENYA**

### **Resettlement and bribery**

Three Oromo refugees in Nairobi have sent information, via OSG, to the UN Inspector General, claiming that they were offered resettlement on condition of paying a bribe of \$2000 and, in two cases, on condition of including two fictitious family members in their applications. The three had each been detained and mistreated by the Ethiopian government and were referred to Kakuma camp when they did not comply with the UNHCR official's conditions. For reasons of security, their detailed statements are not included in this press release.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH WORLD REPORT 2001. ETHIOPIA**

The New York-based international human rights body, Human Rights Watch, released its world report for 2001 on 8 February. The nine page entry for Ethiopia begins:

*There was a marked deterioration of civil liberties in Ethiopia during 2001 in the wake of (and partially as a result of) the war with Eritrea. The government jailed civil rights advocates, political rivals, students, and journalists without formal charges, and police used lethal force against unarmed civilians. In July, the foreign minister told journalists that conditions in Ethiopia were not conducive for liberal democracy. The*

*minister of education acknowledged that Ethiopia's justice system had major deficiencies. Government agencies, she said, interfered in the justice system. The system also often abused its authority and lacked transparency and accountability.*

*The judiciary, with rare exceptions, was complicit in the government's violations of human rights. The courts routinely granted extensions allowing individuals to be held in detention without formal charges and without bail while the police "investigated," usually at a snail's pace. Rarely did they inquire into the need for holding suspects in custody. Court hearings convened every several weeks, only to have the court uncritically permit the police to investigate for months. Court cases historically lasted for years, during which time activists and government critics, apparently held only for their nonviolent criticism of the government, endured harsh detention conditions. Sometimes charges were eventually brought; sometimes prisoners were released after months of captivity without charge or trial.*

Following a brief review of the end of hostilities with Eritrea and the purge within the TPLF and EPRDF, the report describes the riots on 17 and 18 April:

*. . . over forty civilians, primarily students, had been killed and another four hundred injured [the Economist reported 130 killed]. Other campuses also witnessed antigovernment protests.*

*After the riots, nearly 2000 students, over 400 AAPO and 100 EDP members were arrested.*

Concerning prison conditions:

*. . . prisoners who were subsequently released complained of poor sanitation, leading to the proliferation of water- and air-borne diseases such as typhoid, dysentery, and tuberculosis. Four prisoners were reported to have died, including AAPO member Gebrehana Wolde Medhin. Although the government claimed that he had died of tuberculosis, AAPO asserted that he had died as a result of severe beatings . . .*

The use of rapidly passed anticorruption laws to keep TPLF dissidents and their supporters in detention was reported.

Regarding the judiciary:

*Governmental pressure on the courts was exemplified by the treatment of judges who attempted to act independently. One EDP member arrested in April was the party's secretary general, Lidetu Ayalew. A court ordered his release in early June but he was rearrested two weeks later and accused by the police of having used his mobile phone to coordinate the student protests. He, however, was not the only one to be sanctioned. Charges were also brought against the three judges who formed the court panel ordering his release. Lidetu was released again in mid-July without formal charges, after seventy days in jail.*

Prolonged pretrial detention was exemplified by the 2200 former Derg officials who had spent a decade in detention without trial.

The stifling of the free press, the harassment of legal opposition parties and the rigging of local elections was reported.

The government spent \$3 billion on the war with Eritrea. The loss of social infrastructure alone cost over \$200 million.

The continued fighting between the government and the OLF and other armed opposition groups led to:

*. . . mass arrests of local inhabitants suspected of abetting the rebels. They, too, have historically been held for months or years without charges or trial.*

The suspension of the license of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and the detention of two leading figures of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council were reported. Also:

*In May, a court acquitted eight founding members of the Human Rights League after three-and-a-half years' detention on unsubstantiated charges of involvement in terrorist activities. The Human Rights League was a monitoring group founded in 1996 by prominent members of the Oromo community that the government never allowed to function. Other groups that government harassment forced underground or into exile in past years included the Ogaden Human Rights Committee, the Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners, and the Oromo Ex-Prisoners for Human Rights.*

*Both the Ethiopian constitution and legislation empower parliament to create a Human Rights Commission and an ombudsman. Neither had yet been established.*

Following the ceasefire with Eritrea:

*[t]he Ethiopian government subsequently received generous aid packages, even as it used lethal force against demonstrators, silenced dissent, and violently repressed minorities in restless regions . . .*

*. . . In a strong sign of support for the government's policies, the IMF in March approved a U.S. \$112 million loan, and agreed to back Ethiopia's poverty reduction program. Likewise, a meeting of Ethiopia's donors in early April agreed to reschedule or cancel 70 percent of U.S. \$430 million in foreign debts.*

The report included a review of Ethiopia by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child:

*The UN report echoed an April EHRCO report on the 'frighteningly increasing number' of abandoned children in Ethiopian cities. In addition, rapes of young girls were common; even when reported, they were usually lightly punished, if at all.*

Finally, the report commented on US policy to Ethiopia:

*The US continued to show reluctance to speak out publicly against rampant human rights abuses in Ethiopia, with a noticeable exception in April when its embassy in Addis Ababa denounced the use of excessive force against demonstrators.*

*Whereas the US had sponsored the UN arms embargo in May 2000, the outgoing Clinton administration had tried (in vain) to get the ban lifted before it expired.*

*. . . [T]he US throughout the war put insufficient pressures on countries supplying the belligerents, including Bulgaria, China, France, Russia, and others, to stem the flow of arms.*

In 2001, US assistance totaled \$146 million.

#### Abbreviations

AAPO	All Amhara Peoples Organisation (legal opposition Party)
EDP	Ethiopian Democratic Party (legal opposition Party)
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (government umbrella Party)
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OSG	Oromia Support Group
TPLF	Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (dominant government Party)
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees