
Human Rights Abuses in Ethiopia 2004 - 2005

This publication includes information from publicly available sources on violations of human rights in Ethiopia as well as information from victims of abuses, their close relatives and eye-witnesses, which has been sent to OSG. Events and abuses which have received wide and full coverage elsewhere are not reported herein; for example killings, injuries and detentions following the elections in May 2005 have been widely reported by the BBC and the Ethiopian Human Rights Council.

According to anecdotal accounts from refugees and visitors and according to reports by teams from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the widespread detention and mistreatment of civilians who criticise or oppose the government continues in Ethiopia. Prisoners of conscience remain in detention without trial, accused by the government of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front, or other opposition groups. Although fewer reports of abuses are received by OSG than hitherto, evidence suggests that this is related more to increasing difficulties in sending information from Ethiopia, especially from rural areas, than due to a reduction of violations.

The Oromia Support Group is a non-political organisation which attempts to raise awareness of human rights abuses in Ethiopia.

OSG has now reported 3,604 extra-judicial killings and 903 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.

Development and freedom from poverty, food and health insecurity in Oromia and other regions in Ethiopia is severely hampered by lack of democracy and accountability in government.

Press Release 41. July 2005

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Abbreviations

AAU	Addis Ababa University
AFP	Agence France Presse
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (government umbrella party)
EHRCO	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network (UN news agency)
MTA	Macha Tulama Association (Oromo self-help organisation)
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation (government Oromo Party)
OSG	Oromia Support Group
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ADDIS ABABA AND CENTRAL OROMIA REGION

Killings of demonstrators; electoral abuses

Amnesty International (AFR Index 25/008/2005) 9 June 2005, reported that at least 26 demonstrators were killed and over 100 injured by police in three days of mass arrests and shootings. Amnesty International also reported their concern about 1,500 students and other demonstrators who were detained and at risk of torture. Further arrests were reported to be continuing in Addis Ababa and in other towns where students demonstrated. A female student, **Shebray Delelegne, was shot dead** and six others wounded when police opened fire on a group trying to block police vehicles carrying arrested students.

Amnesty International was also concerned that Chernet Tadesse, an investigator for the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), and Andargachew Tsige, former deputy mayor of Addis Ababa and a UK-based author of a book which criticises the government, were at serious risk of torture since their arrest on 8 June. Forty CUD (Coalition for Unity and Democracy) branch party leaders and other staff and 6 EHRCO staff were detained.

On 6 July, (AFR 25/010/2005) reporting the release of the majority of students and political figures, the human rights organisation reported torture and beating of detainees and running/crawling on gravel at police camps such as Sendafa police training camp. 4,500 were reportedly taken to Ziway prison from Addis Ababa alone. Student demonstrators were also detained in Awassa, Jimma, Gondor, Bahir Dar and Haromaya.

Amnesty International stated that 190 Addis Ababa University (AAU) students were still in Sendafa in July and that several thousand may still be in detention elsewhere.

Death sentences and long term detention in Karchale

On 20 October 2004, according to AFP, Addis Ababa, an Ethiopian high court sentenced three OLF members to death and a fourth to 20 years imprisonment. Imam Kelil Oumar, Beyan Ahmed Ousman and Ali Ahmed were sentenced to death and Biftu Roba received the jail sentence of 20 years. They were charged with killings during the Derg era. According to the newspaper *Dagim Wanchif*, 29 March 2005, seven alleged OLF members were sentenced to death, seven to life imprisonment and another seven to 25 years imprisonment. The paper reported that these sentences were given to 21 out of 238 Oromo detainees at Karchale, the central prison in Addis Ababa. The detainees have been held for over 12 years and are reported to have been tortured, isolated from other detainees and in receipt of limited food and medical care.

Death in Karchale

Eshete Zewde Gamada, aged 43 and father of three, **died** in Karchale, the central prison in Addis Ababa, according to the internet radio station *Tensae Ethiopia* on 25 May 2005. He had been detained since 1993/4 and was seriously tortured according to reliable sources in Addis Ababa. He died from a treatable condition because medical care was withheld. Eshete, born in Wayu district, N Showa, was sentenced to life imprisonment by a court in N Showa and transferred to Addis Ababa recently, where he received another 10 years to his sentence. His wife has been refused permission to collect his body from Menelik II Hospital.

Detention, torture etc.

On 12 August 2004, Amnesty International reported their concern about Imiru Gurmessa Birru, a man in his 50s, who was taken 'in a critical condition' to the Police Hospital in Addis Ababa around 11 June after three months in custody at Maikelawi Central Police Investigation Unit (Third Police Station) in Addis Ababa (AFR Index 25/009/2004). Despite being extremely ill, he was taken by stretcher back to Maikelawi on 6 August. He was denied medication and held incommunicado; and therefore at 'serious risk of torture'. The reason for his arrest was not known although he is accused of supporting the OLF. He is reported to have been tortured. He was unable to walk without assistance and doctors advised against his transfer. He was taken to Karchale Central Prison on 10 August but still denied visits by his family, who were unable to deliver his medication. According to Amnesty International 'He is a member of the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church, which is part of the Lutheran World Federation and as a largely Oromo church has also been targeted by the government in the past for suspected OLF links. Many members of the Oromo nationality have been detained without charge or trial on suspicion of having links with the OLF.

He was previously detained without charge in 2000 for eight months, on political grounds. He was reportedly tortured and has suffered from poor health ever since. In 1978 he had been detained and tortured under the Dergue government.'

Radio Free Oromia (*Sagalee Bilisumma Oromoo*) reported on 4 December 2004 the detention and torture of 15 Oromo academics in Maikelawi, including:

Merga Dabalo, from Rift Valley College, Adama
Fikadu Jireenya, administrator, Rift Valley College
Worku Burayyu, Awash Melkassa Research Centre
Mr Kelbessa, Adama Teachers Institute

Information released in urgent action appeals by Amnesty International (AI Indices AFR 25/011/2004 and 25/012/2004, 28 September and 23 November 2004), includes the release and re-arrest of MTA President Diribi Demissie, Vice-president Gemechu Feyera and Treasurer Sentayehu Workneh in August 2004 and their release on 15 November, on bail of 10,000 birr (US\$1,230) each. 'The Central Prison authorities had initially refused to release the men, after the Supreme Court rejected a prosecution appeal against the releases, which had been ordered by the High Court. . . .

Amnesty International considered the three men to be prisoners of conscience. They are the leaders of the long-established Oromo welfare organisation, the Mecha Tulema Association, which the government appears determined to shut down. They deny charges of inciting armed uprising and membership of the armed opposition Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which have been laid against them and 25 others still detained and applying for provisional release. Those still detained include 22 students, Ethiopian Television deputy news editor Dabassa Wakjira, and Nega Kefane Gudata of the Oromo Development Association. Ayelew Itisa, a secretary in the MTA office, has been released on bail.'

The students are accused of exploding a bomb at AAU in April 2004, when one student was killed.

Among Addis Ababa University students who remained in detention the following were named by Amnesty International:

Adugna Daba
Alemayehu Gerba
Bekuma Yemdo
Bilisuma Debare
Kebebo Bobassa
Milkessa Dandana
Talila Bulbula
Tolessa Debella

Amnesty International also named Teachers College students:

Bayissa Belay
Ebissa Melaku,
Commercial College students:

Legesse Yebetu
Teshale Tesfaye,
and Technical College students:

Bogale Shiferaw
Zewdu (Father's name not known)

On 20 April 2005 (AI Index AFR 25/005/2005) Amnesty International reported that Adugna Daba, Bayissa Belay, Bogale Shiferraw and Zewdu had been released a few months previously but that the President, Vice-president and Treasurer of the MTA were re-arrested on 9 February 2005. As well as MTA officials Diribi Demissie, Gemechu Feyera and Sentayehu Workneh, Ayelew Itisa, a secretary for MTA, was also arrested that day. Amnesty International reported that of the original 28 detainees charged with alleged OLF activities (4

MTA officials, 22 students, TV journalist Dabassa Wakjira, and Nega Kefane Gudata of the Oromo Development Association), only two were freed in February. The state prosecutor withdrew charges against the 28 but ‘immediately filed the same or similar charges against 26 of them before a different section of the High Court’. They were refused bail on 15 April 2005.

On 15 March 2005, Reporters Without Borders, a Paris-based organization, in a press release, named television journalists Shiferaw Insemu and Dabassa Wakjira (see above) as continuing to be detained ‘where cases of torture and mistreatment are regularly reported’.

M.D.Ab. wrote from Canada on 26 August 2004 and, typically, reported the continued harassment and mistreatment he received as an Oromo graduate who refused to join the government Oromo party, the OPDO. He describes his early experiences of detention because of supporting the OLF, in 1992, before the OLF withdrew from government. Despite stopping his OLF activity, he was forced to leave Ethiopia. Like many Oromo refugees, he was denied asylum in Norway, before moving to Canada. Parts of his account are given below: ‘I started at Addis Ababa University (AAU) in September 1991, in Natural Science Faculty. I helped recruit other students into supporting the Oromo cause, and helped with organizing groups.

In January 1992 with an OLF member, I went to Chanco, about 45km. from Addis, to observe the election. . . . My cousin and his friend joined me in Chanco. The evening after the election, the four of us were on our way to a restaurant and looking for accommodation. We heard someone shout, ‘Don’t move’, we stopped, and then shots rang out from the far side of the road. The OLF member and I ran and escaped, but **my cousin was shot in the chest and killed**, while a bullet in the shoulder wounded his friend. However, after the incident we found out the person who did that, a member of OPDO and tried to charge him. Because of the warning, my aunt and the rest of the family still live in fear.

I was terrified by what had happened and returned to my parents’ house in Addis. I was too scared to attend my cousin’s funeral. My parents did not want me to return to AAU, but I had no choice. . . . On June 3, 1992 as I was approaching the main gate at AAU, uniformed armed soldiers grabbed me, tied my hands behind my back and throw me into a military vehicle. About 25 of us were arrested at the time. We were taken to a police station at the end of Churchill Road. I was slapped, punched and kicked by the boots of officers. They threatened to shoot me. Sometimes they put a pistol to my head, other times the pistol was laid on the table in front of me. I was interrogated about my involvement with OLF. Tesfaye Affrenew, the local official, came and accused me of inciting people in my area and in AAU against the EPRDF government. He was the man in charge and had full authority to do as he liked. The next day I was taken to Sendafa detention and military camp. The others who were arrested with me were also taken with me. There we endured hard physical exercises. If you didn’t keep up, we were kicked and punched. . . . I

used to get a meal and a cup of tea once a day. Sometimes, they gave us bread full of salt and refused to give any water the whole day. For about two weeks, no one knew where I had been taken. Even after my parents discovered where I was, they were only allowed to see me once every Sunday afternoon, for half hour. I was released on July 24, 1992, after signing a document stating that I would not in any opposition group activities again.

. . . I had missed my first year final exams. I was afraid to return to AAU. However, as I had taken the ESLCE again, I was able to be admitted as a freshman student again in September 1992. Being a freshman gave me a lower profile in AAU . . . [Here, he describes the mass arrests of suspected OLF supporters following the OLF withdrawal in July 1992]

. . . In July 1997, after six years of feeling at risk, I obtained my B.Sc in Mechanical Engineering. I started employment the same month as a designer in a factory.

In early 1998, feeling more secure, I borrowed some cassettes from friends. The songs on the tapes were regarded as promoting the OLF cause. Somehow the Kebele must have discovered that I was in possession of such tapes, and telling my support to OLF in public. On April 8, 1998, TPLF soliders came to my door and arrested me. I was then put in a dark cell and beaten. The next day, I was handed over to an officer and was accused of being an active member of the OLF, of having OLF documents with me and distributing revolutionary, nationalist song cassettes. I was accused of being an OLF agent on a secret mission. Then they went on asking me if I knew any OLF fighters. . . [He was kept in a dark cell for four days] . . . I forced to kneel on the cold, wet prison floor. My knees and ankles were swollen. I had to have treatment as an outpatient at the St. Paulos Hospital in Addis. I am still suffering from pain in my legs, especially in cold weather. I returned to my job, but on arrival, I was told that I was terminated. No reason was given. I became depressed as I had married in February 1998 and had a wife to support as well as a young son . . . As the eldest son of the family, I was supporting my parents, five sisters and a brother. However, I did find a new job with another company.

. . . In May 1998, I started to receive invitations through the local Kebele/Woreda to attend meetings of the OPDO. I was one of the people that they hoped could be recruited. However, I refused. I received about 10 such invitations. I was told if I didn't attend, the consequences would be serious, as I would be deemed to be supporting the OLF in an under-cover role. I was told this by a local police officer I knew in our district. My refusal led to being followed and my contacts with other people monitored.

On February 16, 1999, two men from the EPRDF security forces came to my house looking for me. I was on my way home from work, but was tipped off by neighbors that the security personnel were at my house. I went into hiding in Addis Ababa at a friend's house. The next day I called my wife from my friend's place. She told me that, after waiting for me for long time, they started to threaten her and demanded that she enclose my whereabouts. When she replied that, I had done nothing wrong, the two men started slapping and kicking her, until her face was covered with blood. Because she couldn't

control their beating, she passed out. When she woke up the next morning, she found herself with our neighbors gathered around her. Three days later the security people came to my house again and took my wife and father for interrogation. I decided I should leave the country as my life was in real danger.

S.H.G., aged 34, wrote from exile on 7 October 2004 with details of his repeated detention and harassment since graduating from Addis Ababa University in 1992. He taught the Oromo language and the use of Latin script, *Qubee*, while the OLF legally represented the Oromo in the transitional government in 1991-2. He helped register voters for the 1992 elections and shortly after the forced withdrawal of the OLF, he was arrested on 20 September 1992. He was beaten and stabbed in the abdomen with a bayonet. He was released from hospital 15 days after emergency surgery but was subject to 5 hours of interrogation at Arategna police station before being allowed home with the standard warnings to distance himself from the OLF. He attempted to leave for Kenya but was prevented from crossing the border. Surveillance and harassment from OPDO officials prevented him working as a teacher in Illubabor and he therefore began work as a contracted expert for the Bureau of Planning and Economic Development, where continual surveillance was more tolerable.

Because of fieldwork, he was unable to attend a meeting called by the N Showa zonal administrator, Dhaba Dabale, and was therefore arrested again on 15 February 1996. He was released after 10 days but found continuing employment impossible at both his previous job and at another national government post. However, he was unable to support his family on earnings from farm work and began an academic post in Tigray Region in 1999. He was again arrested, along with many students, after supporting the students' efforts to leave to help fight the wide-ranging forest fires in early 2000. He was initially held overnight, on 12 March 2000, 'in an open field without clothes'. He wrote 'we were cruelly punished that night. We were insulted, degraded and made to crawl on gravel.' During his 31 day detention, he was 'starved, intimidated and ill-treated'.

When students in Tigray demonstrated in solidarity with Addis Ababa students in April 2001, he was again detained with many students and instructors and released after signing a written apology, ten days later. Due to the arrest of colleagues and students with whom he associated, he has been unable to return to Ethiopia since he left on a scholarship program abroad.

Detention of students

Desta Tolera Deressa, a 4th yr technology student at Addis Ababa University (AAU) was detained and initially held incommunicado, when attempting to re-register at the university on 20 October 2004. He was one of the more than 300 Oromo students who were expelled but invited to re-register by university authorities. Close relatives reported the incident to OSG.

Local sources reporting via the Oromo Liberation Front informed OSG that between 10-15 students were detained when attempting to re-register in September 2004, a further 22 were refused registration when they refused to publicly denounce the OLF and join the government Oromo party, the OPDO. Between 280-290 Oromo students re-registered. About 100 who were expelled from AAU in January 2004 are still hiding from the security forces in Ethiopia. Oromo students in Mekele, Tigray Region, report being frequently subject to beatings.

Two Addis Ababa newspapers (*The Reporter* and *Tomar*) reported on 20 April 2005 that more than 20 students at Bahir Dar university were detained on 16 April after fighting occurred between Amhara and Oromo students, following an attack on a lecturer in the Faculty of Law and Business Administration. Four were said to have been injured. 37 were detained and another 43 (named) Oromo students were expelled from the university, according to reports received by an OSG reporter in Norway. Classes were suspended at the university for four days.

More prisons

Eye-witness accounts of conditions in prisons in Addis Alem, W. Showa, and Zeway, S. Showa, were received by OSG in April and May 2005.

The prisons were getting increasingly crowded in mid-2004, because of the detention of farmers who were unable to repay loans or pay taxes. According to one account, 'more and more prisons are being built in Oromia Region while schools and hospitals are being built in Tigray'.

The prison in Addis Alem, holding 800 prisoners, was a recently-converted kindergarten, 'crowded, unhygienic' with inadequate water and toilets. The prisoners and their beds were infested with lice and bed bugs. Deaths were reported, following brief febrile illnesses. 'Almost all prisoners were Oromo, especially those who were uncooperative with the OPDO and accused of being OLF supporters.' The prison at Addis Alem is one of many prisons established 5-7 years ago.

There are two prisons in Zeway, a Federal and a Regional one. The regional prison which was not primarily allocated for political prisoners holds up to 4000 detainees and conditions are similarly poor.

Fewer doctors

Of the approximately 5000 medical doctors from Ethiopia, who qualified there or abroad, only 2000-2,200 remain in Ethiopia, and half of these are in Addis Ababa, according to an Oromo doctor who was interviewed by OSG in March 2005. There are presently more doctors from Ethiopia in the USA than in Ethiopia. This especially applies to Oromo doctors. Whereas 6-7 years ago, 40-50% of doctors in Ethiopia were Oromo, now only around 20% are Oromo, he

estimated. He also commented on the decrease in number of Oromo students attending AAU and the even greater decrease in the number graduating.

EASTERN OROMIA REGION

Killings and detentions in Dire Dawa

In a written statement to the 61st Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/2005/NGO/231, Section 1,1.a. 9 March 2005), the Society for Threatened Peoples International reported that ‘several’ civilians were killed and ‘dozens’ of others were injured when police opened fire in a market place in Dire Dawa, E. Hararge, on 1 September 2004.

The **killing of six** and wounding of 19 others was reported by IRIN on 29 October 2004 and was reported to be due to police clashing with merchants when they protested against the confiscation of goods by the police. The police claim they were seizing smuggled items.

Local sources, reporting to an OSG contact in the USA, claim the **police shot dead** a 14 year-old Somali girl, **Kadira Iban Ahmed**, in Higher Zone, Kebele 21, Dire Dawa, on 18 September and on the same day shot dead **four Guragi and Somali merchants** in other parts of the city, all including the young girl being accused of smuggling goods from Somalia.

Local informants also claim that government soldiers looted several shops in broad daylight in Awuday, 10 miles west of Harar, in the last week of November. They took the goods in ten trucks to a military camp in Adale, 8 miles west of Awuday. On this occasion, the merchants were Oromo and accused of supporting the OLF.

Local sources also reported the detention of 22 Oromo, including a six-month old baby, on 25 November 2004 (5 Hidar, 1997, Ethiopian Calendar) from two Kebeles in Dire Dawa.

Those detained from Higher Zone 4, Kebele 20, were accused of hiding students who were expelled from Addis Ababa University early in 2004 and include:

Aliyi Adam

Dine Ibro

Mohammed Ahmed Omer

Tofiq Hassan

From Kebele 21 in Higher Zone 4, the following were among those detained and were accused of supplying the OLF with food, medicine and money. They include a family of five, with three young children:

Jawad Abdi

Abdella Aliyi Mohammed

Dursitu Abdullahi Ahmed Teyso

Obasaa Abdella Aliyi

Ayantuu Abdella Aliyi

Samiyaa Abdella Aliyi

Dursitu's father, Abdullahi Ahmed Teyso (known as Abdullahi Mazagaja because he worked for decades for the City of Dire Dawa) was detained on several occasions in recent years and is now seeking asylum in the USA. Dursitu is the wife of Abdella Aliyi Mohammed and they were detained along with their three children – Obasaa, aged 3 yrs, Aayantu, aged 2 yrs, and Samiya, aged 10 months (born in August 2004).

Killings, detention and disappearances: one family

The killing, disappearance and detention of members of one family was reported to OSG in the USA, June 2005.

Kamil Jowhar and his brothers, Melkessa and Ahmadin Jowhar, were affluent businessmen with business connections in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, E. Hararge. They actively supported the OLF when it legally represented the Oromo in the transitional government from 1991-1992. Melkessa attended an OLF meeting in Dire Dawa on 14 May 1992 (when the OLF were still part of the government). The treasurer, Melkessa's life-long friend and best man, **Asbah Mohammed Toucha**, was **shot dead** by TPLF soldiers while he was returning home after the meeting. Melkessa was absent on business when, on 18 June 1992, one day after the withdrawal of the OLF from the election, OLF members were arrested from the office in Dire Dawa. On 20 July 1992, Melkessa's wife, **Fahima Abdurahman**, was **killed** while attending a wedding in Dire Dawa. [Her father, **Abdurahman Adam**, was sought by government security forces and was **killed in Djibouti**, where he had fled, in August 1995.] Melkessa Jowhar was arrested when he returned to Dire Dawa for his wife's funeral on 21 July. He was detained without trial until September 1994.

On 5 August 1995, after visiting his friend Dr Makonen Bayu at the former French Hospital in Dire Dawa, **Melkessa Jowhar** was stopped on the road to Harar at the Dhangago check point. He was **shot dead** and his truck and its contents were confiscated. That evening, TPLF soldiers went to the hospital in Dire Dawa and **shot dead Dr Makonen Bayu** (see OSG Press Release, p. 4 December 1995). They were accused of providing supplies to the OLF.

Kamil, Melkessa's brother, had been absent in Europe in June and July and despite warnings returned to Addis Ababa on 4 August 1992. At 1.00 a.m. the following night, his house was surrounded and entered by armed soldiers. His wife and children were forced to lie on the floor while guns were held to the heads of himself and his younger brother, **Ahmadin**. They were told that the soldiers had information that OLF agents and weapons were hidden at the house. A thorough search revealed only a VCR and shortwave radio which Kamil had bought in Europe. These were confiscated and both Kamil and Ahmadin were held separately in Maikelawi CID (the Third Police Station) where they were beaten and interrogated for one month before being transferred to Karchale central prison. Ahmadin was released after one year but Kamil was held until January 1995. After attending the funeral of his brother Melkessa in Dire Dawa in August 1995, Kamil went to visit their mother, in

hospital in Bedessa, E. Hararge. He was arrested later that evening in Bedessa and again detained without trial until September 1996.

On 9 October 1997, late in the evening when three Oromo were shot dead in the capital for alleged support of the OLF (Press Release 20, Nov./Dec. 1997), Kamil was again taken to Maikelawi after his house had been searched. The three who had been shot dead were Kebele neighbours in Addis Ababa. He was beaten when he refused to sign a document incriminating the three dead men as OLF agents and was detained until September 1998.

Two teenage sons of Kamil were arrested for taking part in the demonstrations against government culpability for the widespread forest fires in early 2000. They were beaten, interrogated and held for five weeks. During their interrogation, they were put under pressure to state that their father, Kamil, was an OLF agent in Addis Ababa and were told 'we know of your father's activities and we will soon deal with him'. After the release of his sons in April 2000, Kamil reported being aware that he was being followed and took care to restrict his travel to daytime and in company. The family received threatening phone calls 'death to OLF agents', 'you will pay with your life' etc, and Kamil's house and business were searched many times in 2000.

On 15 September 2000, security forces came to his house, beat him and his family to the floor, where he and his sons were kicked in the abdomen with boots. Again the house was searched. Kamil was taken in a separate truck to his two sons. The sons were released five weeks later from the Kebele prison, where they had again been beaten and coerced to sign documents incriminating themselves and their father, which they did not do.

Kamil Jowhar has been sought widely by his family but has **disappeared**. His brother, **Ahmadin Jowhar**, was detained the day after he arrived to visit their ill mother in Bedessa, E. Hararge, in September 2003, and also **disappeared**. Kamil's wife was detained for three weeks from 30 October 2003 and questioned about the family's activities in Ethiopia and abroad.

Detention, torture etc.

Abdulkhikim Juneydi Bekri wrote from Kenya on 6 October 2004. Originally from Watar, Hararge, he was a student at AAU when on 7 July 1992, just before graduation, he was taken from his dormitory to Kaliti military camp. After 17 days he was transferred to Sabatenya camp, Dire Dawa, where he remained for 3 months before being taken to Hurso detention camp, where he stayed over two years. He was again detained in 1997 for 7 months and reports that **his father was shot dead** in that year. In 1999 he was detained in Kotoni military camp for 7 months and in November 2000 he was taken to Hamaresa camp, where he spent two months. Despite this history, he wrote of difficulties in obtaining refugee status from UNHCR and living in insecurity in Nairobi.

Melkamu Jate wrote from Germany in October 2004, where he had been refused asylum. He worked for a government department advising farmers on sustainable methods in W. Hararge, from 1992 to 1996.

He was first arrested by a policeman named Terefe, on the orders of district administrator Jibril Yuya, and taken from his office in Mesela district to an unofficial detention centre, where he was held for one month. Once a week he was taken at midnight to a forested area, where he was forced to lie naked on the ground and told he would be shot if he moved. He had a pistol barrel put in his mouth and also hot iron burns to his head while he was forced to sign documents incriminating himself and other Oromo professionals as OLF supporters.

In February 1995, when he was head of the Natural Resource Development and Environmental Protection office in Habro district, his colleague **Shemsudin Aliyi**, head of the Coffee and Tea Development office in Habro, was taken by security officers from his home around midnight. He was later found **shot dead** at the roadside on the outskirts of the main Habro town of Galamso.

Melkamu left shortly after when told by a fellow church congregation member, employed by the security department, that he was listed for a similar fate.

He went into hiding in the Nedjo area but was detained in April 1995 for two weeks, when he was again subject to midnight threats when lying naked in the forest and having a pistol put in his mouth. Elders negotiated his release on condition of his never visiting Nedjo for longer than one week.

He went to Addis Ababa and eventually moved job to Chiro, W. Hararge. He was forced to leave in March 1996, after again being warned of his insecurity. He began working for an NGO in N. Showa and avoided the large scale arrests and mistreatment of detainees which began in Chiro in April 1997, after their being denounced at a mass gathering in Chiro stadium. Over 120 were detained, tortured and kept for one year, including Ketema Nega (High School teacher), Ms Yeshe Dhibisa (forestry expert), Mr Zerihun (pharmacist), Mrs Sada (nurse) and Bekele Geleta (Elementary School teacher). They were tortured in an attempt to get Melkamu's whereabouts.

Awal Usman Sheek, an Oromo artist and father of a family of five was taken from his home in Agarfa Irbaye kebele, Bale, by plain-clothed security men on 3 February 2005. He was taken to Maikelawi CID in Addis Ababa, according to sources close to the family on 19 February.

WESTERN OROMIA REGION

Detentions

Amnesty International reported the detention on 26 August 2004 of 'scores' of civilians in Agaro, near Jimma, in Illubabor zone of Oromia Region (AFR Indices 25/010/2004 and 25/013/2004, 28 September and 24 November 2004). In their World Report for 2004, Amnesty International stated that more than 300 were detained 'in a continuing pattern of mass arrests' of Oromo suspected of supporting the OLF. Torture and disappearances of detainees, some of whom were held in secret detention centres, was reported. The detainees included businesspeople (some with telecommunications businesses), regional state

employees, government telecommunications workers and coffee farmers. At least two were taken from their homes during the night. Some had been detained previously. This was the fifth detention for one. Most of the detainees were released in mid October. Those named by Amnesty International were:

Abdu Mohamed Zein
Abdulaziz Abba-Fitta
Balina Gudina
Getinet Gemechu
Ms Khadija Hassan
Siraj Mohamed
Tesemma Olessa

Other detainees included:

Abba Yegazu
Shabudin Mohammed
Naser Abba Fitta
Awel Abba Jabal
Yazied Abba Garo
Raya Abba Gissa
Agga Ollanna
Mohammed Abba Macha
Kumssa Jamal
Abba Jihad Abba Dura
Abdi Gazhangh

At least four of these were not released in October. Amnesty International reported on 24 November that concern ‘still remains for the safety of Abdulaziz Abba-Fitta, Getinet Gemechu and Tesemma Olessa who are being held without charge in incommunicado detention. Getinet Gemechu, who reportedly “disappeared” after being arrested, is now said to have been transferred to the police Central Investigation Bureau (known as Maikelawi) in Addis Ababa, where political prisoners have reportedly been tortured.’

Asefa Tarfa Dibaba, a teacher at Jimma university, was reported on 15 June to have been detained and held incommunicado. Students at Ambo demonstrated and 29 were arrested. Among them, Ashenafi Metekia is being held incommunicado. This information was relayed from local sources to OSG.

SOUTHERN OROMIA REGION

School-children flee Moyale

On 23 August 2004, OSG was informed that 43 school-children from Moyale, the Borana Oromo border town, had arrived in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, two months previously. As yet unregistered, they were forced to beg for food. Of the 37 whose names and ages were provided in the report, about half were between 4th and 10th grade while most of the remainder were older.

Two thousand families expelled from National Park

On 21 December 2004, Refugees International, Washington, D.C., reported that 2000 families were forced from their homes earlier in 2004 to accommodate the development of Nechasar National Park (Nacha Sara in NW Borana zone, southern Oromia Region). Researchers from Refugees International learned from evicted farmers and pastoralists that they were compelled to leave their land so that the park could be fenced and tourist facilities developed by a Netherlands-based foundation. Local inhabitants reported that they received no compensation for being moved from 'lush grasslands' in a 'wildlife paradise', where their thatched huts are empty, after many years of occupation. The area to which they have been moved, outside the park, was already occupied and was cut off from health centres, schools and other social services when floods washed away a road and bridge. 'The planned fence around the park will also separate them from the town of Arba Minch, already a long day's walk away'. A total of about 10,000 people and their livestock (980 Kore farming families and 1,025 Guji Oromo pastoralists) were excluded. Fishermen on Lake Chamo and local families who collect firewood 'will also have their precarious livelihoods disrupted' if plans for the park are implemented.

In February 2004, the Ethiopian government signed a contract with the African Parks Foundation of the Netherlands to manage the park, established in the 1960s to protect Swayne's Hartebeest, in danger of extinction. Other animals are to be reintroduced and contained by electric fencing.

'Tourist accommodations will be built, and tourists will be guided around a pristine natural environment devoid of Ethiopians' stated Refugees International. Although the foundation claims local residents were consulted and their policies include poverty relief for local people, Refugees International report 'It is a cruel irony that, in a time of chronic food insecurity in Ethiopia, people have been forced from land on which they depend for their only livelihood. People and parks should not be incompatible and tourist dollars for the government and the African Parks Foundation should not be earned on the back of such suffering. A sustainable future for conservation lies in developing incentives for local communities to conserve and manage their own environments, not in increasing the suffering of people who already have few opportunities to build secure futures for themselves and their children.'

'Donors to the Africa Parks Foundation, which include the U.S. Department of State, insist that the government and the Foundation work with local people and the former residents of Nechasar National Park to find conservation-based solutions that provide a future for both wildlife and people.'

(<http://www.refintl.org/content/article/detail/4724/>)

In an open letter to UN and other international bodies on 20 February 2005, the OLF state 'Guji people have been living in and around the park for centuries and have a superior tradition of being the guardians of their natural resources'. The OLF also report that the present accommodation for the evicted families is temporary and that huts were burned to precipitate the transfer. They await resettlement by Oromia Region authorities to sites 160 km away. Shortage of

food, unsanitary conditions and disease compound the hardship. The OLF point out that internationally accepted norms are to enable indigenous people ‘to fully participate in creating and managing wildlife sanctuaries. International standards demand that projects of conserving wildlife parks must involve local communities to participate in all aspects of the project. However, the regime’s total disregard for the advice is clear evidence that it employs every excuse to dismantle the Oromo society for political motives.

SOUTHERN NATIONS, NATIONALITIES AND PEOPLES REGION

Amnesty International reported on 17 December 2004 (AFR 25/014/2004) that **‘Omot Ojullu Abella is reportedly seriously ill as a result of having been severely beaten by iron bars and rifle butts** in Gambella prison in south-western Ethiopia on 13 December 2004. He is said to have sustained injuries to his head, back and arm, and to be denied medical treatment.

A possible prisoner of conscience, he was arrested a year previously on 13 December 2003, just before mass killings and arrests of members of the Anuak ethnic group took place in Gambella town, . . . His brother, Okuch Ojullu Abella, was one of those killed. Several hundred other people arrested at the time are still held in Gambella prison, incommunicado and without trial. Many have been tortured or ill-treated, and may be prisoners of conscience.

Omot Ojullu Abella is said to have been beaten in reprisal for commemorative events organized by Anuak exiles in the USA. In Gambella, the government banned any demonstrations or commemoration.

Omot Ojullu Abella is head of the administration and finance department of the regional government’s health bureau. He is also a leading peaceful opponent of the regional and federal government through a political party he co-founded for the 2000 elections, the Gambella People’s Democratic Congress (GPDC). He was detained without trial for a year in 2000.’

‘The situation in the region remains tense, with many more people reportedly killed by soldiers in the past year. Twenty-eight leaders of the GPDC, including former regional governor Okello Nyigelo Olam, remain detained without trial in Addis Ababa, and may be prisoners of conscience.’

TIGRAY REGION

Students beaten, one knifed

Local sources have relayed the information to OSG that Oromo students at Mekele university are frequently beaten. In addition, a message was received on 15 June that Ayana Bulicha, an English language student, was hospitalised after a knife attack on 11 June 2005.

DJIBOUTI

Refugees at risk; refoulement of airforce personnel

On 15 July 2005, OSG was informed by telephone that two pilots and another member of the Ethiopian airforce had been subject to refoulement to Ethiopia. They asked for protection at the French military post in Djibouti on 8 June. They were handed over to Djibouti security services who in turn handed them over to Ethiopian security forces (5 military officers and 2 civilians in two landcruisers) in front of the Menelik and Europe hotels in Djibouti at 2-3.00 a.m. on 12 July.

The informant also reported that 52 Oromo refugees and their 55 dependents (107 in total) were still 'imprisoned' at Awr Aousa camp, awaiting resettlement. One man has waited one year after being accepted by US immigration. The 107 are all that remain after tens of thousands were among the 100,000 forced to leave Djibouti in August and September 2003. About 1300 Oromo were encamped at Awr Aousa while UNHCR and the Djibouti government decided only 52, and their dependents, could remain. In June 2004, following a visit from the Ethiopian prime minister, Meles Zenawi, the remainder of Oromo and other refugees (between 3-4,000) were trucked to the border with Ethiopia. A few are known to have escaped to Kenya and South Africa.

A Tigrean EPRDF security agent, in contact with the Ethiopian embassy in Djibouti and with police and refugee authorities at Awr Aousa camp, is reported to have infiltrated the refugees there. A group of men employed by the Ethiopian government were apprehended in September 2004 by camp police. They carried the name and photograph of an individual refugee and presumably intended to eliminate him or take him back to Ethiopia.

KENYA

UNHCR acts to reduce rape in Kakuma and Dadaab

On 3 February 2005, UNHCR launched a program to reduce rape and gender-based violence in its camps in Kenya. George Okoth-Obbo, UNHCR's country representative in Kenya acknowledged that serious violations had occurred among the 240,000 refugees which Kenya hosts in Kakuma and Dadaab. He explained at the launch of the 'Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Kenya Refugee Programme' that reporting and investigating incidents was being standardised and that previous efforts to curb the problem were being intensified with training of government employees, NGOs, refugees and members of host communities. In the early 1990s, UNHCR estimated 1500 cases of rape. (IRIN, Kenya, 11 February 2005)

IRIN reported on 2 March 2005 that incidents of rape, reported by UNHCR, in Kakuma and Dadaab had fallen from 94 in 2000 to 19 in 2004.

Rape and intimidation in Dadaab

A letter, sent on 9 September 2004 from refugees at Dadaab refugee camps in northeast Kenya to the UNHCR Dadaab sub-office, was copied to OSG.

136,000 refugees are hosted by UNHCR at the three camps of Ifo, Dagahaley and Hagadera in Dadaab,. Only 270 of these are Oromo, who therefore are marginalized by the mainly Somali refugee population and excluded from representation in meetings with camp officials. The letter includes reports of rape and other violations which have not been reported previously by OSG.

Waliyo Abdikarim, aged 18, was raped in Dagahaley camp on 30 March 2004 by a man armed with knife, resulting in pregnancy.

Habiba Hussein Sida, aged 12, was raped in Ifo camp by a policeman in 2003 (reported but not named in Press Release 40, p. 49). The policeman persuaded the girl to accompany him home, saying he had a letter from her sister in Nairobi.

The rape by a bandit of 29 yr old Deka Abdi Ibrahim in Hagadera camp in 1997 has not been reported by OSG previously.

The rape of Zeitun Mohamed Noor, aged 36, in Ifo camp by a bandit in 1996 has also not been reported previously.

Disappearances, suspected abductions from the camp, have also been reported previously (Press Release 40, p. 49) but did not include the following:

Bati Gemedo Osole, from Hagadera camp in 2003

Hundie Terefa, from Dagahaley camp in 2000

Imru Gudina Wabusho, from Hagadera camp in 1998

Abdurahman Hussein, from Ifo camp in 1999

Abdurahman Roba went missing from Ifo camp in 1999 and was found murdered in Dobl, a town on the Kenya-Somalia border

Awel Mohamud Hussein was taken by Ethiopian security forces from Hagadera camp in 2001 and imprisoned in Moyale military barracks, Ethiopia. He was released after negotiation between ICRC and the Ethiopian government. Currently he is living in Hagadera camp.

A previously unreported killing was the stabbing to death of Endale Woldesenbet on 27 April 2004 in Dadaab.

Refugees who have been killed are reported to have voiced fears of violence to camp officials repeatedly before being attacked.

Many episodes of beating, usually by Somali refugees, are reported, as is the poor economic outlook for Oromo refugees at the camps, where income generation is deemed exclusively the prerogative of the majority Somali refugee population.

Each registered refugee receives a monthly allowance of 12 kg maize, 1.4 kg pulses, 1.2 kg porridge and 2-600 ml oil. Educational needs are not being met. The younger children are too frightened to go to school.

Ethiopian government agents, with Oromo names, have been reported among the refugees. Ethiopian troops have been seen as far from the border as Wajir, about 120 km north of the camps.

The majority Somali population of the camps do not approve of Muslim and non-Muslim Oromo eating together, nor of Oromo women not covering their faces. Enmity from armed conflict during the Derg era and from more recent incidents sparked by the Ethiopian government between Oromo and Somali civilians in E. Hararge has fanned the prejudice of these cultural differences. One result is the lack of employment opportunities for Oromo in the camp administration and a 'closed shop' attitude against them. To escape the camps for interviews, refugees need to obtain permits, which only last 15 days. The correspondent, a former university student, writes 'they make us feel like prisoners'.

Nairobi and Kakuma

Following their encampment and expulsion from Djibouti, a number of Oromo refugees arrived in Kenya in 2004. On 26 November 2004 a message was received from Nairobi complaining that they had been met with hostility from UNHCR when they approached an Eligibility Officer who refused to acknowledge their refugee status. Some have written from other countries in Africa (including South Africa) to where they dispersed. Up to one half of the 10,000 or so Oromo refugees estimated to be in Nairobi between 2000 and 2003, are reported to have since been resettled by UNHCR in western countries.

A group of Oromo refugees in Kenya sent a 15 page document to Kenyan and international organizations and to Oromo communities in many countries in October 2004. The document from the 'Dark Day Oromo Refugees Group' includes names of 172 heads of families who have been in Kenya since their arrival between 1999 and 2003. In addition to the insecurity felt in Nairobi, the group state that many have returned to Nairobi after facing worse insecurity in Kakuma and Dadaab camps.

In the area of Eastleigh in Nairobi, where most of the refugees live, and in the queues outside of UNHCR's offices the refugees complain about being sought after by Tigrean and other Ethiopian government agents. They claim that some are inhibited from following up their cases with UNHCR because of the presence of Ethiopian government sympathizers. They corroborate disappearances, rapes and other atrocities in Dadaab, which are referred to above, and shootings and other incidents in Kakuma which have previously been reported by OSG.

The Dark Day group also report disappearances from Kakuma:

Said Hussein Hassen, 1998

Abdusalem Mohammed Madar, who failed to return from Nairobi where he went to report being shot at in Kakuma, 25 May 1995

Mohammed Moktar Mohammed Abdullah, 1994

Elias Adem Mohammed, October 2003

Tura Mohammed Fato and Osman Mohammed Kedir both disappeared after going for treatment of mental illness, year not stated

Hamine Tufa Boki, 16 June 1999

Tekle Hamine Tufa, son of the above, disappeared from Nairobi where he went to complain of insecurity in Kakuma, 21 March 2004

The group believe that the following disappearances from Kakuma resulted from abduction by Ethiopian agents:

Awol Abdullahi, 15 July 1999

Mohammed Jamal, 17 July 1999

Mohammed Sala Tilmo, 2002

Ahmed Roba Wako is reported by the group to have been abducted while in Nairobi, in February 2004, and to have been held in prison in Moyale, on the Ethiopian side of the town, until his release was negotiated by ICRC.

The difficulties in obtaining employment or setting up income generating enterprises in Kakuma and Dadaab are emphasized by the group.

FORTRESS EUROPE

Oromo denied asylum in UK, Germany, Switzerland

Oromo refugees, in genuine fear of persecution in Ethiopia, with histories of detention, torture and mistreatment by the Ethiopian government, are still being refused asylum in Europe. It has long been the case that asylum is refused initially, at least in the UK. Reasons for refusal are contrived and illogical and the majority are overturned on appeal. However, there are many individuals who are being refused at the appeal stages, reflecting a hostile attitude to refugees which is apparent across Europe. The following are only a few examples of genuine asylum seekers who have been refused.

Oluma Aberra, an OLF and MTA member with a history of two periods of detention and refusal to be coerced into the OPDO, would undoubtedly be persecuted in Ethiopia but has reached the end of the appeal process in Switzerland and fears deportation (November 2004).

Melkamu Jate, also with a history of two detentions and OPDO coercion as well as direct harassment at work (see p. 12) has been refused asylum in Germany and fears deportation (October 2004).

Yasin Hassen Ebro has been detained three times despite ceasing OLF activity in 1992. His latest detention was in 2001 but his appeal against refusal of asylum in the UK was finally refused in August 2004.

Dr Thomas Berhanu Gudina, with a history of harassment, public ridicule and threats and who gives a clear history of activities which result in persecution was refused asylum in the UK in 2003.

Kebede Negerti Akwak, with a history of detention and suspension from his government employment has also been refused asylum in the UK and is at the end of the appeal process, with no option to re-examine the case since August 2003.