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## **PRESS RELEASE - October 1995**

The Oromia Support Group aims to publicise human rights violations committed against the people of Ethiopia by forces employed by the Ethiopian Government.

### **Sources of information :-**

1. Urji Newspaper, Addis Ababa, 1.8.95
2. Urji Newspaper, Addis Ababa, 29.8.95
3. Urji Newspaper, Addis Ababa, 15.8.95
4. Urji Newspaper, Addis Ababa, 22.8.95
5. Personal acquaintance of victim, living in USA, 25.8.95
6. Personal acquaintance of victim, living in UK, 30.8.95
7. Person working in Wollega, 1993-5
8. Correspondent A from Oromia, 30.8.95
9. Correspondent B from Oromia, 27.9.95
10. Communication from Fekadu Megersa, Oromo Relief Association, USA, 8.10.95
11. Letter from Lord Avebury, Chairman of UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, 19.9.95
12. Letter from Addisu Beyene, Executive Director, Oromo Relief Association, Addis Ababa, to Tujar Kassim, Commissioner, Relief and Rehabilitation Bureau of Oromia, 9.10.95
13. Letter to Addisu Beyene from Tujar Kassim, 6.10.95
14. Addis Zemen Newspaper, Addis Ababa, 27.7.95
15. Letter from Oromo (D.A.B.), USA, 9.9.95
16. Communications from Oromo (A.G.), USA, 10-21.9.95
17. Letter from Oromo acquaintance of victims (A.C.L.), 10.10.95
18. Urji Newspaper, Addis Ababa, 30.9.95.
19. Clandestine Ethiopian Human Rights Organisation B, Addis Ababa, Memorandum 6, 29.9.95.

## **ADDIS ABABA AND CENTRAL OROMIA**

### **Killings**

Mr Dejene Irkata was shot dead by government soldiers at mid-day, 24.7.95, at the Kafa Hotel in the "Sebattenya" area of Addis Ababa. He was sitting with his friend, Kumsa Tolesa (see Disappearances, below) when approached by an armed man in civilian clothes, carrying a communications radio, who was followed by two armed government army officers. He was ordered to raise his hands. Instead of doing this, he disabled the first assailant and shot all three with the first assailant's rifle. He was shot by soldiers surrounding the hotel. Government news sources claimed he was to be arrested for theft but following the above incident his friend was questioned about Oromo Liberation Front arms. His friend, wife and son have since disappeared (see below). (1).

Shiferaw Feyesa, a third year university student, was murdered by government police on 20.8.95. The police called Shiferaw from his house and shot him dead before searching his house, taking away his documents and leaving his body at Menelik Hospital. His parents found his body amongst others, who had been similarly executed, at the hospital. No reason for the killing was given. He was an ardent teacher of the Oromo language and its Latin script. (2).

Fiqaaduu Fayisaa, a merchant of Billoo, Calliyaa District, W.Showa, was taken from his home by a group of armed men on 8.9.95. The following day he was driven to the towns of Ijaajjii, Guban and Waayyuu, where he had shops. The security men who accompanied him took a total of 100,000 Birr from these shops. They then drove him back to Billoo, where they gathered a large crowd, in front of which they denounced him as "shifta" (outlaw). Mr Fayisaa, hands tied behind his back, was then shot "in the mouth" and died instantly in front of the crowd. (18,19).

### **Disappearances**

Kumsa Tolesa, of Kebele 7, Woreda 12, present at the shooting of his friend Dejene Irkata, was taken for questioning immediately after the shooting, to the Third Police Station in Addis Ababa. He was locked up with other prisoners at about 10.30 pm that night and taken away the following morning (25.7.95) at 9.00 am. He has not been seen since. (1). The wife of Dejene Irkata, Mrs Almaz, and their son, Motumma Dejene, aged 3 yrs, were taken from their home at Chew Berenda and imprisoned on the evening of Dejene's killing (see above). Their whereabouts are not known. (1).

According to Urji newspaper, 15.8.95, following military activity against armed opposition forces, there has been a wave of imprisonments and disappearances in Arsi and East and West Showa zones, beginning in the second week of August. More than fifty civil servants and other Oromo civilians have been abducted by armed government security men and "most of the victims' whereabouts remain unknown".

Among these abductions :-

Geremew Eticha (Iticha), an agronomist at the Malka Warer Agricultural Research Station, near Nazareth (Adama), E.Showa, was taken from his office by armed men in civilian clothes at 5.00pm on the 14th of August. His friends say he was taken to a nearby EPRDF Defence Camp at Barta (called Arba). It is believed that he may have been subsequently taken to Addis Ababa. He had returned home after completing a M.Sc. in Italy and, in 1992, a one month training course in the soil laboratories at the University of California. While in America, he talked about the suspicion that EPRDF cadres had about educated Oromo supporting the OLF. He considered applying for asylum in the US but, because of family responsibilities in Ethiopia and the difficulty in obtaining a work permit and asylum status, he returned home. Family and friends do not know where he is or whether he is alive. (3,5).

Kebede Disasa, Personnel Officer at W.Showa High Court Office, was taken from his office and bundled into a car by armed men in civilian clothes in mid-August. He was taken to his home while it was searched with nothing incriminating found. His family were then locked in the house so they could not see where he was taken. Local police told the family that they did not know where he was. (3).

Birra Rorrissa, head of Administrative Service and Finance Section of E.Showa Urban Development Office, was abducted in a similar fashion and about the same time as Mr Disasa (above). (3).

45 "peaceful residents" of Habura town, Gidda district, and around Zeway, were "hand picked" and taken to unknown destinations on 8.7.95, following the dissemination of leaflets in the area. After this incident some policemen in the district were sacked or moved elsewhere. Friends of the abducted persons were in fear of being treated similarly and unwilling to give evidence to the newspaper reporter. (3).

Major or Capt. Taddese Lamma,  
Fufa Gabbisa,  
Tesfaye Fufa (Mr Gabbisa's son),  
Mengistu Chimisa and

Mr Garomsa, all residents of Ambo, W.Showa, were all abducted on or just after 10.8.95. The reason for their abduction and their whereabouts are unknown. A senior EPRDF security officer, Sisay Berihe, had been murdered in Ambo a few days previously. (3,4).

Mrs Bogalech Guddata was abducted from her house, 2-680, Higher 2, Kebele 09, Nazareth (Adama) at mid-day, August 1st. A group of more than ten armed men in uniform and civilian clothes, speaking a mixture of Amharic and Tigrinia, gathered around her home at 5.30am. They split into several groups, one remaining to search Mrs Gudata's house. They asked her the whereabouts of her ex-husband, Col. Getachew Haile, and when given the reply that she had no husband, they punched her. They forced her to unlock her telephone and made several calls. The other groups returned with kidnapped victims and they all left, with Mrs Gudata, around mid-day in a vehicle bearing an Addis Ababa number plate.

Wondi Axir Getachew, a student, son of Mrs Bogalech Guddata, was taken from their home when the group of armed men returned the morning following her abduction (above). The men thoroughly searched the house a second time and told other family members that Mr Getachew would return after seeing his mother. He did not.

Mrs Bizunesh Guddata (Tolasa), the eldest sister of Mrs Bogalech Guddata, was taken from her sick bed, where she had lain for 5 months, on August 3rd.

Iferem Miskom, son of Bizunesh Guddata, was abducted with her.

Mrs Loommi Shimbiro, 88 year old mother of Bogalech and Bizunesh Guddata, was threatened with a machine gun but not abducted.

Mrs Ayalech Guddata, sister of Bogalech and Bizunesh Guddata, has disappeared following her house being searched. It is not known if she has been abducted. The whereabouts of the three sisters and their two sons are unknown. The reason for these abductions is not known. The whereabouts of Col. Getachew Haile, ex-husband of Bogalech, are not known, nor whether he is still alive. (4).

Just before going to press, OSG was informed of the following disappearances in Addis Ababa (17) :-

In August, Alamayyo Dhugumaa  
Tamesgen Adaba

Jirenya, and two other un-named persons.

In September, Dachaasaa Bayyane and  
Warqineh.

### **Imprisonments etc**

In the August Press Release, Meeti Asefa was one of five persons identified when being taken to a clinic for treatment of torture wounds received at a military camp near Dembi Dollo, W.Wollega. A 16 yr old girl, Meeti asked to be killed rather than suffer more

torture. She was moved to Dhideessa camp and thence to Zeway prison in S.Showa. She has asked that she receive more visitors as she believes that prisoners who receive no visitors are more likely to be killed in custody. (6).

## **WESTERN OROMIA**

### **Campaign against OLF in Western Wollega**

In July and August there has been a co-ordinated campaign in Western Wollega Administrative Zone by government forces to reduce support for the Oromo Liberation Front. The Oromia Support Group has received three separate eye-witness accounts of indoctrination courses and associated imprisonments and disappearances (7,8,9). An account of one indoctrination course also appeared in Urji newspaper (2).

During this period a "large number" of government soldiers have been deployed throughout Western Wollega in an attempt to destroy OLF fighters and supporters (9).

In Dembi Dollo, 74 people, including 4 women (one believed to be European) and many Oromo elders and prominent members of the Mekane Yesus Church were forced to attend a course in the local stadium from July 13th to 23rd. They were forced to agree to statements that the OLF is against democracy, peace, freedom and development ; also that the OLF exists only for the benefit of its leaders and is suppressing the Oromo people. (7,8).

One of those attending the course in Dembi Dollo is at risk of being disappeared. Mr Asafa Ayana, director of the Mekane Yesus run Bethel Evangelical Secondary School in Dembi Dollo, was imprisoned for a few days at the time of the elections in May. Although he was accused of hiding guns in the school grounds, it is believed he was arrested for not registering to vote and not encouraging the teachers on his staff to register. A second short spell in prison followed. At a big meeting at Kellem Comprehensive High School Hall, he was publicly denounced as "number one reporter for Urji" newspaper and "organiser of the OLF in the area" - neither of which is true. He and eight others at the meeting were told by the EPRDF officer in charge that they would be held responsible for any OLF activity in the area. He is not allowed out of Dembi Dollo. He did not want his situation made public. (6,7).

Civil service employees of Gimbi and Dembi Dollo provincial areas (including Nejo, Mendi, Bojji, Birmajii, and Aira) were all given a two week seminar in late July/August during which government offices were closed. Those in Nejo had to travel 75km to the provincial headquarters at Gimbi to sign a declaration that, if found to be involved in any way with the OLF, they should be executed without trial. After signing this they were taken to see the body of a man executed by security officers for allegedly being a member of the OLF. (2). All people working in government offices in Wollega, especially those in positions of authority, are being assessed for their support of the EPRDF and its Oromo organisation, the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation (OPDO). If they are not supporters they are dismissed or demoted. (9).

### **Killings**

The man whose body was shown to civil servants as a warning to have nothing to do with the OLF (see above) was a stranger in the neighbourhood of Gimbi. His name was apparently Mohamed. He was chased and shot by security men on suspicion of OLF membership. (2).

## Disappearances

Three farmers from the Geellaa area of Garjeedaa village, Anfillo District, W.Wollega, were arrested in July for allegedly co-operating with the OLF. Their whereabouts are unknown and "nobody knows whether they are alive or not". Their names are :-

Raggaassaa Fayyisaa Simaa  
Gizawuu Gurmeessaa Daaqaa and  
Buusaa (8).

The names of ten individuals, from Qaaqe Woreda, Wollega, who were disappeared in 1994, were sent to OSG just before going to press (17). None of the names have been reported by OSG before. They are :-

Aliko Shifawu	Birhanu Daaqaa
Husen Yadata	Xoone Bushura
Abaate Milkii	Lalisa Qajeelaa
Darajee Maammoo	Geetacho Bushau
Garramuu Gabbisaa and	Abdisa Woldi.

## Imprisonments etc

"Quite a lot" of farmers around the town of Muggi in Anfillo District, W.Wollega were imprisoned in July as part of the W.Wollega campaign (see above), allegedly because of co-operating with "anti-peace individuals or groups", sheltering OLF fighters and providing food for those hiding in nearby Garjeedaa forest (8).

The following are among those imprisoned between May and August :-

Meseret Elias, a health assistant working in Dembi Dollo Red Cross pharmacy, accused of supplying medicines to OLF fighters. His being tortured was reported in the August Press Release.

Gebeyehu Gabbissa, a primary school teacher in Dembi Dollo, accused of supplying bullets to the OLF, reported to be tortured in August Press Release.

Kenno Tolessa, a restaurant owner in Dembi Dollo, accused of supplying food and information to the OLF. He is being held in the EPRDF army camp. (9).

The following were arrested in late July and August, as part of the W.Wollega campaign. They stand accused of supporting, directly or indirectly, the OLF. All except the last two, who are held in Anfillo, are in prison in Dembi Dollo :-

Kukulie Kenea, peasant of Dale Bururi Peasant Association, Dale Waberra Woreda		
Shambi Gossa, "	"	"
Addama Shambi, son of S.Gossa,	"	"
Chala Muletta,	"	"
Sheikh Faris Abdurahaman,	"	"
Getachew Modofa, peasant of Gopo Peasant Association,		"
Adisu Agamso, of Kake town, Dale Waberra Woreda,		
Temesgen Tolessa, teacher, Garro-Kebe Woreda,		
Bokka Dhinsa, coffee merchant, Dembi Dollo,		
Shobba Atomsa, peasant of Anfillo Woreda. (9).		

Killings and imprisonments following conflict between OLF and EPRDF forces in February, 1995, in the Sigimo and Gatira Districts of Illubabor, were reported in the August Press Release. It has recently been found that some of those imprisoned are being held in a secret detention centre known as Gumay near to the EPRDF military camp, in the Worrengo area

of the province. Among 140 prisoners, "it is estimated that about 40" have died due to shortage of food, water and medical attention. (19).

### **Environmental destruction**

The Garjeedaa forest, Anfillo District, W.Wollega, is "being cleared of its valuable mature trees with no reward for the area". The produce is being taken to Tigray. (8).

### **SOUTHEASTERN OROMIA**

Since mid-August, over 200 farmers have been detained in the Arsi Region following fighting between OLF and EPRDF forces. "A number of houses were burned down." Many civilians in the area are said to have been killed, having been labelled "shifta" (outlaw) by EPRDF forces. (19).

### **OROMO RELIEF ASSOCIATION - CLOSURES AND IMPRISONMENTS**

Following the closure of the ORA programme and office in Negele, Borana, S.Oromia, reported in the August Press Release, the office in Chanka, W.Wollega, W.Oromia, has been closed and ORA personnel in both offices have been arrested and held without charge. (10,11,12,13).

On 4.8.95 the ORA office in Negele was occupied by government troops (and/or police) ; two light vehicles and warehouses full of food commodities were confiscated. On 21.9.95, three staff members were taken from their homes and imprisoned without charge. They remain in prison. Their names are :-

Fraa'ol Galataa, Project Officer  
Ms Martha Areero, Store Keeper and  
Hayilu Gammachuu, Accountant.

On 29.9.95 the ORA office in Chanka was taken over by armed forces, and stores and vehicles confiscated. Three staff members were imprisoned for three weeks without charge, being :-

Bariiso Abba Gada, Accountant  
Kennasa Yaadataa, Store Keeper and  
Degefu Mangashaa, Construction Supervisor.

Fifteen orphan children and eleven hybrid heifers were left unattended.

ORA's operations benefit about 500,000 people and have an input of about 20 million Birr. About 200,000 people are dependent on ORA for subsistence. (10).

The reason given for the closures by the Council of Oromia Bureau of Relief and Rehabilitation Commission is that ORA is too small an organisation for the project areas. However, no other Non-Governmental Organisation has been given responsibility for the projects initiated by ORA and supported by major western NGO's. The UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group asserts that the announced reasons for the closures are spurious. (11).

ORA were ordered by a letter from the Oromia Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, on 6.10.95, to hand over all their projects to respective zonal Ministry of Agriculture offices within ten days (13). This is in breach of agreements signed by ORA and the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission of Ethiopia, which do not expire until October 1996 (Chanka, W.Wollega), or December 1995 (E.Hararge and Negele, Borana). Two of the projects had been seized by troops well before this letter was sent. The letter did not respond to requests that the imprisoned ORA staff, vehicles and stores be released. The ten day deadline gave insufficient time for the Executive Director of ORA to convene a Board Meeting to validate

any handover, to discuss with donor agencies, nor to arrange the laying off of 147 people involved in implementing the projects. (12).

In contrast to the fortunes of ORA are those of the Relief Society of Tigray (REST). At least 80% of monies donated to the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission is channelled to REST. The US Agency for International Development has now established direct contact with REST, thereby internationalising the organisation. It has recently agreed to donate 24,000 tons of grain and 4.6 million dollars to REST. CIDA, the Canadian Government International Aid organisation and Oxfam, Canada, have assigned 5.6 million dollars for the same agricultural development project. Preparation is also underway for a 2.3 million Birr aid package from UNDP for National Emergency Preparedness in Tigray. (14).

### **A VISIT TO OROMIA, SPRING 1995.**

Excerpts from letter to OSG, (15).

Last spring, after 10 years absence, I went back to my home village (name omitted by editor) in Illubabor, Western Oromia, to visit my family. Before I went, I had mixed feelings about whether this government is as brutal as I had heard, or as democratic and peaceful as portrayed in the western media. After I went and observed the situation myself, I became convinced that this government is indeed cruel, brutal and repressive.

I am astonished to learn of safe houses, even in my small village. I learnt how Tigrean security police prefer safe houses to police stations to secretly keep, interrogate, rape, torture and brutally murder innocent civilians after kidnapping them at gunpoint. Everyone in my village is familiar with TPLF detention centres and concentration camps. At least one member of each family has been in such camps in Wollega or other provinces.

During my stay, I witnessed numerous disappearances and killings of innocent civilians, some of which were reported in **Sagalee Haaraa**. Two of my own brothers were taken in detention in Wollega. The whereabouts of my other brother and nephew is not known to this day. My father was detained and later released with a warning for not showing up for (the) election. Many elementary and high school teachers in this region have quit and fled the area because of harrassment by Tigrean soldiers. Like in all other parts of the country most government offices and busines sectors have been taken over by Tigrean and Eritrean nationals. Workers are hired and fired at will. It was such a heart breaking thing to see and listen to the horrifying stories of discrimination, harassment, rape, torture, killings and burglary of homes by the Tigrean army. I am convinced that the government is undertaking a calculated effort of butchering the life and spirit of the Oromo people. I came back devastated.

(L)istening to a misrepresentation of facts by the western media is not only painful but....unbearable.

Today, in almost all regions of...Ethiopia, there is no rule of law. The TPLF occupying army and the(ir) watchdogs, the OPDO (Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation)..., are loose all over, acting in the most savage and brutal way, denying the people a basic right to a peaceful life. This is the fact and true picture of Ethiopia today. There is neither peace nor democracy, as the West has attempted to portray in its news media.

D.A.B., California, USA. 9.9.95.

P.S. Although there are numerous incidents of rape cases, it has not been reported as much as it should be. Most victims choose to be quiet about it because of their culture. I talked to more than twenty women in the village and found that almost half of them are victims, but they did not want to be identified. As a woman who is born and grew up in that culture

I would probably be pressured to do the same. But I believe we should find out ways to expose the magnitude of the suffering of Oromo women.

### **A VISIT TO OROMIA - JULY/AUGUST 1995**

Excerpts from communications sent to OSG, (16). "Qubee" is the Latin script used for writing the Oromo language, "afaan Oromoo", in contrast to the Gaez script used for Amharic, Tigrinia and Tigre.

Finfinnee seems no more Finfinnee. Abyssinians are trying to do whatever possible to ensure Oromos have no political or economic right(s) in the heart of their own country. In some offices I visited I could not believe the offices (were) in Finfinnee, rather than Mekele. Oromos are being discharged from their workplace under the (name of) "restructuring", (are being) detained for (being) OLF supporters, (and are) regularly observed just for being Oromo etc.

(According to government policy) departmental positions of government organisations must be occupied by EPRDF party members. Workers of any organisation are categorised and listed ethnically and invited to attend lectures of "-PDO" cadres, similar to the "Wuyiyit Kibeb" of the Dergue period. (N)ot to attend such lectures is no different from a decision to quit the job.

Currently (in Finfinnee) there are no newspapers and magazines in "afaan Oromoo" or "Qubee". As you all know, all those (which) started flowering some three years ago, are dead now. Qubee teaching activities are almost nil now. Pressures (on) Qubee teaching include killing Oromos who are involved in teaching. (The friend of a man killed because he taught Qubee) told me "We are targetted only for the fact that we are teaching Qubee. We did nothing illegal. They have no legal reason to detain us, as they do journalists under the Press Law. The only means they have to frustrate Qubee teaching is secret killing."

Kidnapping and secret detention is still going on. No-one knows the whereabouts of those kidnapped. A few have been observed at Zeway detention camp, 160km south of Finfinnee, and others (as) labourers in Tigray for the Tigray Development Association. Only God knows for the rest.

The pressure from the Tigrean military is continuing and seems unbearable. Almost every family is affected by pressure exerted on them to surrender. (Detention, torture and mistreatment are) common all over Oromia for suspicion of being an OLF or OLA (military wing of OLF) supporter. Any young Oromo with long hair is suspected of being a member of OLA, and cannot move freely. Many told me they were detained or interrogated for having long hair. It is difficult to get the total picture of the mistreatment going on there. Many disappear with no trace. Many are just killed in public. Many are dying due to mistreatment under detention. Many have paralysed hands or feet and cannot survive anymore as farmers.

As an example, I could not get in touch with my older brother, a farmer and father of eight, who was imprisoned a week before my arrival, for the second time in two months. One of his legs is already out of use due to torture during his first detainment. All the torturing and military activity is being done only by Tigreans. The OPDO are simple translators.

You might (have) once thought about the correctness of the information contained in Urji (newspaper). I had the same feeling, but now I understand that the information is quite concrete. The problem is rather that the newspaper cannot give us the whole picture due to poor coverage and the Press Law.

The Tigreans are deployed not only on physical torture but are doing their best on mental torturing, crushing economic capability and darkening future intellectual capacity.



Youngsters cannot get jobs unless they support the OPDO. I witnessed during my short stay that registration for Teacher Training Institutions has the prerequisite of being an OPDO supporter. Because of this fact, it is now very common in Oromia to discontinue high school education and go back to farming. Anyone can understand where this is leading concerning our educated manpower of the future. What can you say if your brother tells you that he is going to be a supporter of the OPDO and stand beside the TPLF, just for the sake of (earning a) living?

A.G., USA. 10-21.9.95.