
Human Rights Abuses in Ethiopia 2007 – 2008

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Political repression

Local elections and by-elections, April 2008

The ruling EPRDF umbrella party won landslide victories in federal House of People's Representatives and Regional State council by-elections and Kebele (local, Peasant Association) council and city council elections on 13 April and in the Woreda (district) council elections on 20 April, according to the National Election Board (NEB) on 18 May. The board described the elections as free and fair and claimed a 93% turnout by Ethiopia's 26 million registered voters.

Although the turnout in Addis Ababa was probably nearer 70-80% from exit poll research reported by the *Horn of Africa Bulletin*, and a much lower turnout was reported by independent sources elsewhere, there was nonetheless an apparently huge swing away from opposition parties which had made significant gains in the 2005 national and city council elections.

The EPRDF won 38 of the 39 seats in by-elections for the federal parliament (with one going to the CUD, whereas the CUD had won 14 in 2005) and 67 out of 79 seats in Regional state council by-elections. All 2,970 seats in all of the 99 Kebeles making up 10 sub-cities of the Addis Ababa administration were won by the EPRDF.

In 2005, the CUD gained control of Addis Ababa city council but large scale arrests of their candidates left the city in the hands of a government-appointed caretaker administration. In April, the CUD won only one of the 138 Addis Ababa city council seats, the remainder going to the EPRDF. In 2005, these figures were exactly the reverse, 137 going to the CUD and only one to the EPRDF.

In all, government party candidates won in over 3.5 million of the 3.6 million vacant seats.

A joint press statement by the OFDM and UEDF on 30 January claimed that the government had already rigged the elections. UEDF deputy chairman, Merera Gudina, leader of the Oromo People's Congress (OPC) reported that over 300 UEDF members had been arrested, 150 recently, and chairman Professor Beyene Petros said that the greatly increased number of seats in local bodies – from 100-300 for each Kebele, an approximately ten-fold increase, and 60-120 for each of the 547 Woreda councils, meant that opposition parties could not field enough candidates. Both leaders complained of offices being closed and their members being harassed and arrested.

OFDM chairman Bulcha Demeksa also complained of arrests. For example, four members were detained in Agaro and 27 OFDM candidates in Gohazion and Kuyou Woredas. 'They arrest and then they release. If they release five opposition candidates here, they make sure seven or nine . . . are behind bars elsewhere' he said to *Ethiopian Review*. A few days earlier, Bulcha complained to *The Reporter* of the NEB's refusal to register OFDM candidates wherever they tried to field

more than a few candidates in a constituency. Large numbers of candidates were needed for an effective opposition voice. ‘But each time we field a large number of candidates, it is taken as a threat and results in our candidates being rejected’ he said. ‘Even though our candidates were of age, they were simply declared to be underage, and then disqualified.’ He also pointed out that the public funding, guaranteed under electoral law, had not materialised.

According to the *East Standard*, a total of 3.6 million seats were vacant, for which opposition parties were only able to field 16,000 candidates, compared to the more than 4 million fielded by the ruling EPRDF parties.

After the elections, Bulcha Demeksa said that the OFDM had only been able to field 2% of its 6,000 candidates and prior to the UEDF withdrawal, Beyene Petros, had said that only 25% of UEDF candidates were able to stand.

Mesenazeria Amharic weekly newspaper reported on 13 May that CUD party coordinators had been attacked. One, Ketemaw Ali, who had been coordinator for Dessie in the 2005 election, was so badly beaten when arrested by security forces on 29 April, that he died on 6 May. Three others had their properties destroyed in Gofa, Southern People’s Region, and another, the CUD chairman of Markela Kebele in Gofa, was ‘illegally removed’ by EPRDF officials.

After two weeks of field research, mostly in Oromia Region, Human Rights Watch (HRW), corroborated the claims made by OFDM and UEDF politicians in a Press Release on 10 April (*Ethiopia: repression sets stage for non-competitive elections. Opposition candidates, voters silenced ahead of local polls.*). The 4 million candidates which the government fielded for the local elections, according to state media, amounts to one in twenty of the population.

HRW reported that Zone, Woreda and Kebele officials cooperated in detaining, interrogating and threatening opposition candidates, searching their homes without warrant and in some cases physically assaulting them. A 31 year-old school teacher told a HRW researcher that he was detained by police and questioned by Woreda and Zonal security officials when he went to register as an opposition candidate in western Oromia. ‘They accused me of being an OLF member and said I would be shot . . . They put a gun in my mouth and then made me swear I wouldn’t go back to the opposition’ he said. He was held for nine days, until the deadline for registration had passed. Other UEDF/OPC candidates also reported being detained.

Secondary school students of voting age in Cheliya Woreda were required to produce letters from neighbourhood (gott and garee) officials attesting that they did not belong to opposition parties, before they were allowed to register to vote. A civil servant in Gedo was told by his superior that he would lose his job if he supported the opposition.

HRW’s Africa Director, Georgette Gagnon, said ‘The same local level officials who are directly responsible for much of the day-to-day political repression that occurs in Ethiopia have their jobs at stake in these elections. As such, their efforts to intimidate ordinary people into returning them to office are especially intense.’

HRW reported that constituencies where there was strong support for opposition candidates in the national elections in 2005 were particularly liable to prevent registration of opposition candidates. For example, in Fincha, western Oromia, the OPC candidate won 81% of the vote in 2005 but was forced to flee Ethiopia after being accused of supporting the OLF. The OPC tried to register three different candidates for the by-election but all three were physically threatened by Woreda officials and by police so that they were prevented from registering. One was detained for over a week when he tried to register.

Ten of 14 OFDM candidates in western Oromia were pressurised into withdrawal by local officials. In Dembi Dollo, 16 OFDM members were detained for two weeks in February and threatened with physical harm by local officials after their release. The police failed to investigate the burning of the home and crops of one OFDM member. The OPC gave Human Rights Watch the names of 300 members who had been detained since November 2007, often on the basis of alleged involvement with the OLF.

NEB officials cancelled registration of candidates on spurious grounds of their not meeting age or residency criteria, despite clear evidence to the contrary. NEB officials provided names of candidates to local officials and police. Police cordoned off access to NEB offices to prevent opposition candidates entering to register. No more than a token number of OFDM or UEDF candidates were allowed to register and candidates were threatened with arrest if they persisted in competing. Others were offered bribes to withdraw. One OFDM candidate told HRW he had been offered college tuition fees and a job in the administration by local party officials if he withdrew.

The *International Herald Tribune* included an *Associated Press* report on 10 April that at least 17,000 UEDF and OFDM candidates dropped out under pressure. Bulcha was quoted saying 'People have been told all kinds of scary things, like their children won't find jobs when they finish school . . . that if they starve, they will not get any food'. A student teacher in Nejo, Seifu Tamiru, reported being warned when he stood for the OFDM 'If you keep on running for this position, you will not be employed as a teacher. Nobody in your family is going to be employed.' His campaign did not last one week.

The *International Herald Tribune* reported the burning down at night of one UEDF candidate's home. Beyene Petros said the UEDF's 'biggest success was that no-one has been killed'.

Internal records of the parties showed that 3,000 OFDM candidates and 14,000 out of a total of 20,000 UEDF candidates had been forced to step down from contesting the elections.

'Democracy in Ethiopia is stillborn. It is not active now' said Bulcha.

Government spokesman, Bereket Simon, told *Associated Press* that Bulcha's assertions were 'simply baseless; there is no harassment . . . the opposition and the ruling party haven't experienced any intimidation'. But *Associated Press*

‘interviewed a dozen candidates and voters who gave independent accounts of intimidation by local officials’.

UEDF withdrew on 10 April, citing the NEB’s failure to register its candidates in 596 polling stations in Oromo and Southern Peoples’ Regions, according to *Addis Admas*.

OFDM and Afar Liberation Front Party (ALFP) pulled out two days before the 20 April round. ALFP leader, Kedafo Adyahis, complained of candidates being arrested and being withdrawn for their safety. He and Bulcha Demeksa complained that their representatives had not been allowed to observe the first round of elections on the 13th. The police arrested 15 of 20 ALFP observers in Afar Region. The ALFP chairman said that central committee member, Woizero Mefera Mohammed, was detained with two other members from 5 to 7 April after complaining that 250 voting cards had been hidden in a house. Kedafo also reported that some voters put multiple ballots in the box and Bulcha reported that an election official had taken a ballot box to his home in Baku, W. Showa.

According to the April HRW report, ‘The patterns of repression and procedural manipulation . . . are motivated in part by the increased importance that control of Woreda and Kebele administration has taken on since 2001. Financed in part by the World Bank and other donors, the Ethiopian government has decentralised the provision of basic services such as health and education. This has effectively empowered Woreda administrators, who are appointed by the elected councils, with greater discretion in the allocation of budget expenditures.

The Kebele system in particular is also a central part of the ruling party’s elaborate system of surveillance, intimidation and coercion of ordinary people who are perceived as being unsympathetic to the government. . . . Local officials in Oromia have also made use of the Kebele system, along with smaller cells called gott and garee, to keep residents under constant surveillance for signs of government criticism.’

Once they were published, senior researcher for HRW, Chris Albin-Lackey, told the *East Standard* that the results of the elections ‘were a stark illustration of just how far Ethiopia’s political space had been closed off since the limited opening that preceded the 2005 polls’.

Aftermath of 2005 election

The *Sudan Tribune* reported on 9 July that nearly half of the CUD members and supporters who remained in detention following the 2005 elections and disturbances had been released. Of those who were known to be still detained, 31 were released on 8 July and another 40 remained in detention. According to the VOA media round-up on 15 July, either three or twelve remained in detention. Netsanet Demissie and Daniel Bekele, human rights lawyers and prominent civil society officials, who remained in detention long after the other high profile CUD detainees had been pardoned and released in July 2007, were released on 28

March. They were kept in detention because they chose to mount a defence in court, rather than sign confessions of guilt. Their eventual release followed their signing a letter ‘acknowledging mistakes’, according to an Amnesty International Press Release on the day of their release.

The youngest member of the central committee of the CUD, Alemayehu Mesele, who was released with the majority in July 2007 after 19 months detention, was harassed and subject to surveillance after his release. On 6 May 2008, he was reported on the *Ethiopian Media Forum* website to have fled the country after being severely beaten by Ethiopian security forces.

ONC Member of the federal parliament, Gutu Mulisa, was beaten by seven unknown assailants in his house in Ambo, W. Showa, on 20 October 2007. When he went to Ambo Woreda police station ten days later, he was detained for over seven hours, threatened and intimidated by the police, according to the Ethiopian Human Rights Council 29th Regular Report, January 2008.

Students detained, dismissed and threatened

In a Press Release issued on 9 November 2007 and distributed by *Radio Free Oromia (Sagalee Bilisumma Oromoo)*, Former President of Jimma University Students Union and of the Ethiopian Higher Learning Institutions Students Union, Hunde Dhugassa, reported on difficult conditions faced by students in Ethiopia.



He had spent five years studying law and two years in extracurricular activities. As President of the Students Union, he attempted to expose government ‘deception and cruelty’ to human rights organisations and foreign ambassadors. He wrote of the persecution of the writers of the Oromo Graduates Bulletin, which was banned by the government in 2007 on the pretext that it was an organ of the OLF.

In particular, he warned of the government’s strategy of creating conflict between students of different nationalities, to weaken their opposition to the government.

He complained of the alarming increase in the number of security agents on university campuses, with powers to remove student ID cards, threaten students at gunpoint and dismiss them from university.

He wrote of the forcing of students to join the government Oromo party, the OPDO, and the resulting label of being an OLF supporter for those who refused, with its associated and possibly lethal persecution or prospect of unemployment – ‘a serious punishment in a country like Ethiopia’.

Because of his outspoken criticism of government behaviour, he was threatened at gunpoint by security agents in Jimma and during official visits to Awasa and Gondor universities.

Qeerransoo Biyyaa wrote on 21 January of more difficulties for Oromo students. On 1 January, he reported, over 200 students at Arba Minch university were arrested and some were injured by live ammunition for celebrating the western New Year, on the pretext that this was 'promoting a subversive OLF agenda'. He also complained of arbitrary dismissal of students from universities, citing the dismissal of 12 students from Jimma university and their removal from the campus by heavily armed federal police on 18 January. They were dismissed for wearing T-shirts exhibiting maps of Oromia or depicting Oromo heroes and sports personalities, attracting accusations of being sympathetic to the OLF.

According to the 13 January edition of *The Reporter*, an Amharic bi-weekly, 17 Jimma university students had been injured in clashes between students two days previously, when stones and iron objects were thrown. The conflict was followed by the arrest of 17 students 'all of one ethnic group'.

Qeerransoo Biyyaa also wrote of the derogatory name-calling of Oromo students at the instigation of and with the protection of government security forces in disturbances which followed, so that Oromo students were further victimised when security forces intervened.

Any attack is justified by labelling students as members of the OLF. Of several hundred arrested, most will be suspended for a year, a few dismissed and a few detained indefinitely, he wrote. Some are shot dead. The attacks tend to occur one or two weeks before final examinations, to the disadvantage of those detained until two days before their exams.

On 7 April, according to the weekly, *Enbilta*, classes were suspended at Mada Walabu university in Robe, Bale, after clashes between students over which language was used in a discussion about catering at the cafeteria. The fighting continued until next day and federal police were still guarding the campus three days later.

On 8 April, another Amharic weekly, *Menazeria*, reported that Addis Ababa university students were being put under pressure to join the ruling EPRDF coalition party or face difficulties being employed after graduation. This pressure had increased since the 2005 elections with EPRDF cadres assigning followers to nominate members and supporters among their fellow students. The newspaper reported that EPRDF members were likely to obtain immediate employment after graduation.

Internet and Press

Reporters Without Borders launched its first Online Free Expression Day on 12 March to ‘condemn cyber-censorship throughout the world’ and combat ‘the growing tendency to crack down on bloggers and close websites’. A spokesman said that 62 cyber-dissidents were known to be imprisoned across the world and more than 2,600 websites, blogs and discussion forums were closed or made inaccessible in 2007.

Two new additions were made to the Reporters Without Borders list of ‘Internet Enemies’; Zimbabwe and Ethiopia have now joined the other 13 countries – Belarus, Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

On World Press Freedom Day, 2 May, according to the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists’ Association, 10,000 copies of the monthly entertainment magazine *Enku* were seized by police, one day before it was to be sold. The magazine’s publisher and deputy editor, Alemayehu Mahtemework, and three of his staff were imprisoned for four days and since then, *Enku* has been out of circulation. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said that police impounded the magazine following a tip off from printers that the cover story, concerning the trial of reggae star Teddy Afro (Tewodros Kassahun) for an alleged fatal hit and run accident in November 2006, could lead to ‘incitement’.

The performer’s imprisonment has caused popular protest. His song ‘Jah Yasteseryal’ became a popular anthem of pro-democracy demonstrators in the disturbances which followed the 2005 elections.

CPJ said that despite the release of 15 journalists who were jailed on trumped-up charges during the 2005 crackdown, Ethiopian authorities have continued ‘their long-standing pattern of repression of independent media through intimidation and arrests’.

On 6 March CPJ condemned the two-week detention of three journalists for Muslim papers on defamation charges in February. Editor Ezedin Mohamed and Publisher Maria Kadi of *Al Quds* and Editor Ibrahim Mohamed of *Salafia* were released on bail of 20,000 Birr each. The arrests and the confiscation of computers and printers from both newspapers’ offices followed the reprinting of a letter which had been wrongly attributed, on a website. Ezedin Mohamed was also detained for six days in December. Both papers face closure because of the cost of bail and replacement of equipment.

Enbilta reported on 7 March that Managing Editor Tamrat Gebre Giorgis, deputy editor-in-chief Issayas Mekuria and reporter Wudineh Zenebe of *Fortune* were held at the Addis Ababa Police Commission Economic Crimes Investigation Department on March 5 to give statements and finger prints before being released

on bail, following an indictment for libel by Ayat Share Co. and a file for damages of over 20 million Birr.

Enbilta also reported that former editor-in-chief of *Hadar* newspaper, Dawit Kebede, who was released last year after a detention of 20 months together with the detained CUD leaders, and who is now the editor-in-chief of the new newspaper *Awramba Times*, was held for a day and bailed on 6 March at District 6 Police Station for posting an advert for his paper on a poster promoting EPRDF candidates for the April elections.

A public announcement from the International Press Institute on 16 June stated that a Board Meeting on 14 June in Belgrade unanimously voted to keep Ethiopia, Nepal, Russia, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and Zimbabwe on their Watch List, a list of countries in which press freedom conditions have rapidly deteriorated. Ethiopia was criticised for using 'the legal system to stifle journalists who refuse to tow the line' and for the continued disappearance of two Eritrean journalists, captured entering Somalia in late 2006.

New Press Law

After six years of critical comment by national and international human rights groups and press organisations, the controversial Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation was passed by Ethiopian parliament on 1 July. The language of the title, preamble and introduction obscures the legislation against press freedom within the bill, according to resolutions of a UN-sponsored Horn of Africa Press Institute (HAPI) media practitioners meeting at the Ghion hotel the following day. Vague and ambiguous wording will enable prosecution for reporting government plans and the government will decide on defamation charges without complaint from individuals who are deemed to have been defamed.

The Ministry of Information will not only be in charge of the content of media reports but also in charge of prosecution for breach of its own rules. Newspapers can be closed and forced out of business arbitrarily on the grounds of national security interests or the criticism of government officials.

The HAPI meeting resolved 'We have come to understand . . . that the proclamation is incompatible with the (Ethiopian) constitution and other international human rights laws, conventions and agreements. It is a reversal and desecration of victories achieved by the repealed press law (of 2004).'

The compensation for 'moral damage' has been increased one hundred-fold to over \$10,000.

Journalists at the HAPI meeting pointed out that restrictive measures had already been enacted during the six years of the bill's preparation. The 2005 Criminal Code created the punishable offence of 'participation in crimes by the mass media' and the Ministry of Information was empowered in 2007 to use registration and

licensing procedures to punish dissent. The government was already entitled to stop the distribution of a newspaper if the attorney general deemed an item to be a criminal act.

An Inter Press Service (IPS) report from Johannesburg on 8 July described the law as undermining the ‘growth of the independent private sector by placing its fate in the hands of the information ministry’.

Serkalem Fasil, who, with her family, spent over a year in detention after the 2005 crackdown, told IPS that three newspapers and magazines belonging to the country’s largest private publisher, Serkalem Publishing House, remained closed, together with ten other independent publications, leaving hundreds of journalists unemployed or forced into exile.

Serkalem said that she had applied for new press licences according to the law and constitution a few months after her acquittal and ‘though we were assured by the Ministry of Information that we had fulfilled all legal requirements and are entitled to the licenses by law, we were advised to pursue the issue at the Prime Minister's office, which had extra-judicially interceded to block the applications. Ten months later, we are still patiently waiting for the application of rule of law. The provisions of better laws are desirable, but they will hardly matter if they are not binding and could be abrogated at will by government officials, as has been clearly established in our case.’

The current regime has muzzled the private press increasingly effectively since it came to power. Dozens of Oromo language newspapers and magazines, which flourished in 1991 and 1992, were closed in the early 1990s and the last surviving independent Oromo language newspaper, *URJII*, was closed when its staff were detained in 1997 on charges of conspiracy, later proved to be unfounded.

Proposed law to restrict NGOs

‘Ethiopia’s government has already made meaningful public engagement in governance impossible in many areas by persecuting its critics and cracking down on freedom of expression and assembly,’ said Georgette Gagnon, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. ‘The clear intention of this legislation is to consolidate that trend by taking the ‘non’ out of ‘nongovernmental’ and putting civil society under government control.’

The latest draft of Ethiopia’s proposed Charities and Societies Proclamation which was published in late June was severely criticised by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in a joint statement issued at the beginning of July. Both organisations have also published separate detailed legal arguments against the proposed bill which they say breaches international human rights law and Ethiopia’s own constitution.

Promoted by the government as improving accountability and transparency of the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), ‘the law’s key provisions are blunt and heavy-handed mechanisms to control and monitor civil society groups while punishing those whose work displeases the government. It could also seriously restrict much of the development-related work currently being carried out by some of Ethiopia’s key international partners’, the joint statement said.

The proposed law would empower government agencies to veto the registration of any NGO and then find any civil society group which was not registered to be ‘unlawful’ and punish activities such as attending meetings with large fines or prison sentences of up to 15 years. Disseminating information, such as this statement issued by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, would be punishable by imprisonment.

A proposed Charities and Societies Agency would monitor and control all civil society activity. Meetings would require one week’s written notice. All activities would be monitored and all meetings could be attended by police officers. The agency would have the power to disband NGOs which had been registered, and the power to alter staffing and management to the point that an NGO’s organisational mission was changed.

Any NGO which received more than 10% of its funding from abroad would be deemed ‘foreign’ and banned from any work related to human rights, protection of the rights of women, children and people with disabilities, conflict resolution and many other issues. This would disempower indigenous human rights groups such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Council by removing their access to foreign funding, as well as prevent Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch from operating in the country.

These and other provisions of the bill would have a devastating impact in any context but the impact would be ‘still more ominous’ in the context of the shrinking political space in Ethiopia. ‘Over the years, the government of Ethiopia has demonstrated a pattern of repression, harassment of political opponents and human rights defenders critical of the government, and pervasive human rights violations’ according to the report.

Despite Ethiopia being one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world, its two main donors, the USA and Britain, which contribute \$600 million in foreign assistance per year, have been unable in private and intensive discussions with Ethiopian officials to ameliorate the most repressive aspects of the proposed law.

‘This law is not just an assault on independent civil society organisations,’ said Michelle Kagari, deputy Africa director at Amnesty International. ‘It’s part of a broader effort to silence the few independent voices that have managed to make their criticisms of the government heard in an increasingly repressive climate.’

In a separate publication which mounted detailed legal criticism of the draft legislation (AFR Index 25/005/2008), Amnesty International considered ‘the Draft

Proclamation to be a serious violation of citizens' human rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, which would prevent them from freely forming organisations, meeting together and criticising government policy. If passed into law, the Draft Proclamation will open the floodgate for individuals and members of independent civil society organizations to be arbitrarily arrested and detained, assaulted and harassed by state agents. Under the Draft Proclamation, human rights NGOs would face intrusive and unwarranted state surveillance of their operations.'

Amnesty International then gave the two following illustrative examples of Ethiopia's already repressive actions against NGOs.

'The prosecution of Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie

Daniel Bekele is the policy manager of ActionAid in Ethiopia. Netsanet Demissie is the founder and director of the Organisation for Social Justice in Ethiopia. Both are prominent human rights lawyers. In November 2005, they were both arrested during major political unrest following the national elections of May 2005. Both men were held and tried along with leaders of the opposition CUD party and a number of Ethiopian journalists. They chose to enter a defence, unlike their co-accused, during a trial process that ran for over two years. In December 2007, they were convicted by a majority verdict of the Ethiopian Federal High Court of provoking and preparing 'outrages against the Constitution' and were sentenced to 30 months imprisonment. Amnesty International believes they were prisoners of conscience, detained and convicted solely for their peaceful work as human rights defenders. On 28 March 2008, both were pardoned, after signing a letter apologising for their actions. Their detention and prosecution demonstrates the risks and obstacles facing human rights defenders who carry out legitimate activities in Ethiopia. The prolonged detention and conviction of two prominent human rights defenders in Ethiopia, Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie, were not only grave violations of their fundamental human rights, but have had an intimidating effect on other human rights defenders working in Ethiopia.

The expulsion of humanitarian agencies from the Somali region

On 26 July 2007, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) confirmed that it had been ordered by the Ethiopian Government to leave the Somali region of Ethiopia, also known as the Ogaden, and was given only 7 days to pull out, after 12 years of presence in the region. The ICRC has a strict policy of independence and impartiality and before the expulsion order was supplying medical supplies and running water and sanitation projects in the region, as well as visiting detention facilities and monitoring the treatment of detainees. As of 3 June 2008, the ICRC had not been allowed to return to the Somali region. In August 2007,

two sections of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) reported that they were being repeatedly denied access to their programs in the Somali region, in spite of a signed agreement with the government and a presence in Ethiopia since 1984. A spokesperson of the Ethiopian Government was quoted by IRIN as rejecting the accusation and claiming that the Ethiopian government had ‘never blocked any NGO’ from the region. The spokesperson also accused MSF of making ‘political statements,’ reporting ‘fabricated stories’ and ‘have an agenda of blackmailing the Ethiopian government.’

These incidents are only two of a number of instances where the Ethiopian government has sought to repress NGOs active in Ethiopia. Amnesty International fears that these instances demonstrate that the motivation of the Ethiopian government in drafting the Draft Proclamation is an attempt to create a legal framework to enable repression of and state control over NGOs, particularly those that may criticise government policy, or expose human rights abuses perpetrated by Ethiopian security forces.

The Draft Proclamation provisions and objectives are inconsistent and incompatible with Ethiopia’s international and national human rights obligations.’

The Amharic weekly *Mesenazeria* reported on 1 July that the Ministry of Justice had cancelled registration licences of 17 NGOs in the preceding ten months, alleging that some had undertaken activities which were ‘not included in their establishment objectives’ and others had not submitted auditors reports.

Clashes between groups

Although the government is unlikely to be responsible for all of the episodes of fighting between groups of peoples in Ethiopia, some of the following accounts include features of previous clashes which were shown to have been instigated by government forces. The government has been blamed by opposition groups for some of the clashes and has in turn blamed those same opposition groups.

January/February, Konso vs Government forces

The Reporter published on 10 February the deaths of more than 30 civilians and 18 federal police officers in Derashei Leyu Woreda, Southern Peoples Region, in three days of fighting from 3 February and the newspaper also reported the earlier killing of five civilians and two policemen in a similar attack from 4-6 January. In the first episode of violence 44 houses were burnt and 5,500 people were displaced. The fighting was apparently due to administrative changes in the formation of Leyu Woreda. The local government party MP said there were

indications of involvement of the OLF, which denies ever having targeted civilians and would have had no reason to be involved in that area.

February, Kore vs Gujji Oromo

Nagadras on 29 February reported fighting from 21 to 26 February between Kore and Gujji Oromo in Amaro, when Gujji Oromo grazed their animals on the Kore's irrigated farms after being forbidden the use of the Gelan river. Ten were killed. On 18 March, *Mesenazeria* reported that 24 had been killed and 26 injured, and that 28 local officials were being held responsible for not doing enough to control the fighting.

March, Gujji vs Borana Oromo

The *Ethiopia Media Forum* reported that a rocket launcher was used in fighting between Gujji and Borana Oromo on 4 March. Tens were killed and homes were burnt when Gujji, armed and agitated by the government according to the report, set fire to the bush, provoking Borana Oromo to retaliate. Government security forces stood by.

April, Gujji Oromo vs Sidama

The OLF and the Sidama Liberation Front (SLF) issued a joint statement after armed clashes from 2-7 April between Sidama and Gujji Oromo around Wando Genet, Southern Peoples Region, claimed the lives of more than 40 and caused large scale destruction of property and displacement of people. Both organisations claimed that the government had instigated the fighting. *The Reporter* (12 April) quoted Gujji leader, Mengesha Tibo, saying that police from Awassa had joined in the fighting, which followed education language decisions and was precipitated by chanting and stone throwing after Arefa celebrations.

April/May, Borana Oromo vs Konso

Addis Neger reported on 4 May that four had been killed and over 1,400 displaced from Teltele Woreda, Borana, in fighting over grazing and farming rights in the previous four weeks. A zonal police officer was himself arrested after the conflict for failing to act to prevent it. *Sendek* reported on 7 May that 34 had been killed in the district in clashes on 4 May. *Sudan Tribune* reported one week later that 36 had died, 35 of whom were Konso, and 5,000 had been displaced.

June, Alaba/Arsi

VOA media round-up on 12 June included a brief report of more than five being killed in land disputes on 5 June, which had been precipitated by three Kebeles being designated to one town, between Alaba and Arsi, 300 km south of Addis Ababa. Federal police were called to quell the disturbance.

June, Afar vs Isaa, Afar vs Government forces

An Afar human rights group reported on 14 June that armed Isaa attacked the Afar villages of Mille and Adaytu, 530 km north of Addis Aaba between 10-12 June, killing two government vaccinators and then 30 civilians. Ethiopian government soldiers then arrived and killed more Afar villagers who had gathered to collect their dead.

May, Benishangul Gumuz massacre of Oromo in Eastern Wallega

The worst episode of inter-communal fighting, in terms of its horrific violence and its significance for future relations between former good neighbours, was the slaughter of defenceless Oromo by Benishangul Gumuz militia in the Didessa and Hanger valleys, Eastern Wallega, from 17-19 May. Well-trained and armed by the government with AK47s



and heavier machine guns, Gumuz militias attacked unarmed Oromo villagers as they slept, slaughtering men, women, children and babies, cutting throats, dismembering bodies and casting body parts aside – limbs, breasts and genitals. Local informants reported to OSG contacts in the UK and to the Oromo Human Rights and Relief Organisation (OMRHO) in Germany. They were able to gain access to only a limited part of the affected area, a portion of Wallega which is adjacent to the Sugee district of Kamashi zone of the Benishangul Gumuz Region. Investigators went to Saasiggaa district and described the carnage at Haroo Waataa, Camp 4, Camp 5, Camp 8 and Baloo villages. Other areas involved included Limmu district, particularly Arqumbee village, and, among other districts which were not specified, the villages of Amba 7 and Mandar 10.

The informants described the conflict spreading to other areas after 19 May. Houses and crops were burnt, women and children raped, animals looted and bodies burned in large numbers to confuse accurate data gathering. In particular, men were targeted for killing.

Investigators said they were hampered by government forces from gaining access to areas other than Saasiggaa district. They found 115 bodies, which were buried in four graves, containing 40, 30, 25 and 20. From Haroo Waataa village alone, 65 bodies were counted. From information given to the team by victims' families, they estimated that 400 had been killed up to 19 May.

They collected only a few names of the dead:

Tesfaye Qana'a
Waqqari Deti
Bogale Waqtole
Salbana Galata
Kabade Salbana

Fiqadu Salbana
Fayisa Wadajo
Tarafa Nagara
Badri Jamal
Samuel Waane

Forty of the badly injured were taken to Nekemte hospital, including the following six from Haroo Waataa village:

Samuel Tolasa
Daniel Dhaba
Adam Mohammed
Daraje Fiqadu
Adamu Imana
Warkinesh Fiqadu
Abraham Mallasaa

Three villages in Saasiggaa, including Haroo Waataa and Baloo, were totally destroyed and are now uninhabitable.

By 21 May, over 12,000 had fled from the area and were camped in Nekemte and at a Saasiggaa primary school where they were being assisted by the Ethiopian Red Cross.



Samuel Tolasa

Oromo civilians are forbidden from carrying arms, but ordinary Gumuz are not. Regional and federal police were unable or unwilling to stop the killing, although they witnessed it and prevented neighbouring Oromo villagers and militias from coming to the aid of the victims, according to local informants.

A VOA journalist reported seeing injured victims in Nekemte hospital but was unable to obtain answers from local police. Few reports reached the Ethiopian press. *Enbilta* reported only 50 deaths and *Goggle* reported the incident as land dispute clashes between Oromo and Benishangul Gumuz who had camped on the Nekemte – Bure road, with a death toll of 120. The newspaper also reported that a bus was set alight at Menge, on the road from Nekemte to Asosa with the loss of life of most of the passengers.

ABBI Weekly (30 May – 7 June) reported that the Secretary-General of the OFDM, Bekele Jirata, after speaking to victims in hospital, had said that the conflict had spread to Gimbi with the burning of a few houses there. At that stage Bekele Jirata reported 130 deaths and the displacement of 8,000 villagers.

However, according to *Reuters*, when the OFDM Secretary-General called for a public enquiry at the end of June and complained of government silence on the atrocity, he stated that the death toll was 400 by 31 May and the number of displaced 10,000. The government called the OFDM report an exaggeration and claimed that only 20 had been killed.

In a statement on 24 May, the OLF claimed that the Benishangul Gumuz militia were so heavily armed by the government that local police were forced to flee before them, along with Oromo civilians. They called on Benishangul Gumuz and Oromo to refuse to cooperate with the government's divide and rule policy. The OLF blamed the government for exacerbating the land shortage by making agreements with bio-fuel companies to misappropriate hundreds of thousands of hectares of land from the region. They claimed that the massacre was aimed to deflect attention from that scheme.

Ethiopian Media Forum meanwhile reported on 28 May that, according to Benishangul Human Rights Advocates, the Vice-President of Benishangul Gumuz, Sabil Albakhit, Regional Member of Federal Parliament, Zaruqe Hamdan Ali, and over 50 civilians from Oda village in Benishangul Gumuz Region had been detained by TPLF security police.



Daniel Dhaba

Addis Ababa and Central Oromia

Killing

Barecha Kumsa, high school sports teacher and trainer of the police athletics squad in Ambo, W. Showa, was detained in Maikelawi Central Investigation Department for six months from 5 April 2003 for alleged involvement with the OLF, according to one of his former police trainees, now in exile in the UK. Two days after his release, he was killed by unknown assailants and his body left at the roadside in Ambo.

Disappearance

The Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA) reported the detention, torture and disappearance of law graduate **Dirirsa Biqila** in their 4th Press Release, November 2007, and Annual Report in June 2008.



Dirirsa Biqila showing scars from beatings

Dirirsa was one of 14 graduates at Mekele university, Tigray Region, who were denied their degrees and diplomas upon graduation for allegedly organising an ‘OLF-affiliated anti-government movement’ at the university. Although born in West Wallega, the 25 year-old went to Addis Ababa after graduating in July 2006. On 30 November, he was taken by plain-clothed security men at 2.00 p.m. from the Megenanya area of Addis Ababa, blind-folded and handcuffed, to an underground prison where he was beaten and tortured so severely that he lost consciousness. After two days, he was taken to the Air Force base at Bishoftu (Debre Zeit) where he was subjected to further torture. After another 2-3 days he was returned to Addis Ababa and held briefly in the Lafto sub-city police station before being dumped very early on the morning of 5 December 2006 in the Walo

Safar area of the capital. His family were unable to trace him after his later disappearance at the end of December and believe that he has been secretly detained and possibly killed.

Detentions

The following were reported in October 2007 by the Washington-based group, AFRO-O (Advocacy for the Fundamental Rights of Oromo and Others) to be held in Maikelawi CID:

Chanalew Beliu, businessman, from Bedele, Illubabor

Jiad Said, Mettu, Illubabor

Tamrat Demise, Bedele, Illubabor

Ethiopia Temesgen, Bedele, Illubabor

Kalifa, student, Jimma

Wondimu Fiqire, businessman, Bedele, Illubabor

Sherif Ibrahim, businessman, Jimma

Feqadu Bulti, development agent, Jimma

Adunya Balcha, teacher, Addis Ababa

Germa Tesfaye, businessman, Jimma

Dawit Kana'a, businessman, Jimma

Mohammed Abanaga, businessman, Jimma

Mohammed Siraji, businessman, Jimma

Tola Chali, barber, Addis Ababa

Muzeyen Gudeta, carpenter, Bedele, Illubabor

Pawlos Gemechu, farmer, Adama, E. Showa

Addisu Badasa, university student, Addis Ababa

Demelash Taye, Addis Ababa

Desalegn Debela, Addis Ababa

Jirata Falmata, Addis Ababa

Sibhatu Banja, Addis Ababa

Berhanu Mulisa, Addis Ababa

Haile-Gabriel Ararsa, Addis Ababa

Kalbesa Abalu, Addis Ababa

Dereje Yiheyis, Addis Ababa

Furdisa Yadata, Addis Ababa

Abate Bekele, student, Nekemte, Wallega

Qatee Gidris, Addis Ababa

AFRO-O also reported the following residents of Shashemane, S. Showa, being held at the same time in Shashemane Police Station:

Gamachu Shambi

Kadir Waritu, teacher

Umar Haji Abdiqadir, farmer

Ahmed Aliye, farmer

Desta Addis

Denkinesh Unka, farmer

In the same report, AFRO-O listed these detentions in Arsi and Showa:
Gelda Geso, 80, farmer, Akaki, nr Addis Ababa, held at Dukem police station
Amana Korbe, farmer, held at Kofele police station, Arsi
Bera and Desalgn Obse, farmers, held at Adama police station, E. Showa

Students reported held in Bishoftu (Debre Zeit):

Abiot Fekadu	Efrem Lama
Abdi Gari	Dejene Xasew
Dadi Gallan	Asafa Mulat
Kibru	Berhanu Tolera
Melka Tegenu (a singer)	Tamrat Abdo
Tuji Korjo	

The following farmers from Girar Jarso were held at Fiche, N. Showa:

Seyoum Girma	Dereje Janka
Girma Tefera	Cheru Zewde
Selemon Tsega	Kara Zewde
Fesiha Lema	Negash Meko
Berhanu Abera	Fekadu

The following residents are reported to be held at Yaya Gulele, N. Showa:

Nanesa Lemu, farmer	Addis Bezaw, student
Girma Gameda, farmer	Dereje Hailu, businessman
Kidane Girma, businessman	Selemon Shumi, businessman
Tesfaye Gari, student	Teddi Berhanu, farmer
Ayelech Werku, student	

Police ordered grenade attacks during student protests in 2004

In the widespread student and civil unrest from January to May 2004, precipitated by the detention and dismissal of large numbers of Oromo Addis Ababa university students, over 7,000 students were arrested and at least 11 were killed.

OSG reported that grenades were thrown among the demonstrating students in Addis Ababa, Waliso, Bishoftu and Dilla. These were thought by the students to have been thrown by government forces. (OSG Report 40, July 2004, pp. 2-18.)

The US State Department country report covering 2004 also reported that a grenade was thrown among demonstrating students at Ambo secondary school on 15 April and caused injuries to 30 students.

A 39 year-old former policeman and OLF member reported to OSG on 4 June that he was asked with two other policemen, by his commanding officer, to disguise himself as a mature student, enter the Ambo school compound and detonate the hand grenade on 15 April. He refused to take part and was therefore detained, beaten, demoted and banished to guard duties in Senkele police training camp.

The recent bombings in Addis Ababa, on 14 April and 20 May, were loudly blamed by the government on the OLF and/or ONLF just as the grenade attacks in 2004 were blamed on the OLF. As in 2004, the OLF has strongly denied any involvement.

The explosions at two hotels in Negele Borana during celebrations on the anniversary of the downfall of the Derg on 27 May were also blamed by government spokesman Zemedkun Tekle on the OLF, but a Somali Islamist group claimed responsibility, according to *Associated Press* on 29 May.

Eastern Oromia

Killings and near killing

Investigators for the Toronto-based Human Rights League in the Horn of Africa (HRLHA) reported that on 30 October 2007, 30 year-old businessman and father of four, **Abdi Abraham**, from Dire Xiyara, Kombolcha, E. Hararge, was **shot dead** by government soldiers while driving close to a nearby military camp in Didibo.

HRHLA also reported the beating to near death of 19 year-old Abdala Osman Adam from Ilili Darartu, Badano, Gara Mulata, E. Hararge, when he was arbitrarily detained by soldiers on his way to Jijiga on 28 October 2007 on business. After suffering severe head injuries, he was thrown into the bush. Two days later, he was found still alive. He told the HRLHA reporter that he had been accused of being a member of the OLF.

A nephew of **Adem** and **Ararso Rabo**, Oromo activists in Anano Mite, Jarso district, E. Hararge wrote from Norway on 30 April of the detention and extra-judicial killing of his uncles in 2002. Once he fled from the area, his home was destroyed by fire and other relatives were thus killed.

Detention, torture and killings

Omar Shato Meo, 49 year old geologist and import/export businessman, was interviewed by OSG on 30 July 2006 in Minneapolis. He was from Guba Qoricha, Habro, W. Hararge, and described three episodes of detention.

In 1993, he was held for two months at Bishoftu (Debre Zeit) air force base.

In 1995, he was held for six months at Awash military camp, E. Showa and then five months at a detention centre near Awash Sugar Factory. While at the military camp, he was tortured in three ways. He was denied food and then presented with food but beaten when he tried to put it to his mouth. He had all of his toe nails evulsed. He was suspended from a beam with his arms tied tightly behind him for periods of two hours – enough to leave scars apparent to the interviewer but not to

have left him paralysed. He witnessed detainees being killed at the sugar factory detention centre. He described prisoners being tortured until they almost died and then being shot dead, in the centre of the factory.

He saw 19 prisoners, including Jamal Yuya and Ali Hassan, being killed by being thrown into a deep pit by the sugar factory.

In 1998, he was detained at Chiro (Asebe Teferi), W. Hararge, for three months. He was not beaten or tortured but had to sign a document before he was released, forfeiting his life if suspected again of OLF involvement.

Detentions

The following residents of Dodola, W. Bale, were reported in October 2007 by the Washington-based group, AFRO-O (Advocacy for the Fundamental Rights of Oromo and Others) to be detained at Dodola Police Station:

Jamal Nure

Lole Haji Titmo

Hussen Shale

Mulugeta Tesfaye

Mohammed Ibrahim

Awal Bekele

Abera Deresa, said to be held in Arjo Police Station

Western Oromia

Killing

EHRCO reported in their 29th Regular Report, January 2008, the shooting to death by a police officer of **Zerihun Abate**, aged 17, in Nekemte, around midnight on 29 April 2007.

Detentions

OFDM leader Bulcha Demeksa reported to *Afrol News* on 6 September 2007 that at least 107 people had been held in Nekemte, Wallega, on suspicion of OLF involvement since July and August, when elders and three Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) activists were detained.

On the same day, Amnesty International (AFR 25/020/2007) named eight of the detainees in Nekemte police station and stated they were at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Amnesty International reported that three executive committee members of the regional office of EHRCO, Fekadu Negeri (teacher), Ibsa Wake (lawyer) and Tesfay Burayu (teacher), were detained with 12 others on 23 August. Seven were soon released without charge but the other eight remained in detention until 7

September; the three EHRCO officials and Abraham Likasa, teacher Workneh Dinsa and students Jiregna Keba, Osman Dawer and Tamrat Tadesse. The EHRCO officials had been detained and released without charge previously.

The following residents of Bedele were reported in October 2007 by Washington-based AFRO-O to be held in Bedele Police Station, Illubabor:

Muzeyen Itana, teacher	Mokonnen Kanaa, Bedele Beer Factory employee
Ayana Zewude, development agent	Aliyi Waga, farmer from Gachi
Meseret Binor, student	Mintesenot Banti
Naser Abamagal	Chala Teshome
Mitiku Gamta, farmer	Sefu Indashawu, agricultural development agent
Habtamu Waga, civil servant	Mohaba Abdir, teacher from Gachi
Solomon Tadesse, student	Shibru Tasisa, from Chawaka
Feqede Jifar, Bedele Beer Factory employee	

AFRO-O also reported the following residents of Chawaka being held in Bedele:

Ashiqu Degefa, student	Darge Galata
Tufa Furi, teacher	Melkamu
Duguma Firsas, teacher	Getacho
Awalu Alemu	

The following residents were listed by AFRO-O to be held at Darimu, Illubabor:

Ismael Hussen	Gabbata
Hussen Ibrahim	Ibrahim Husain
Alemayo Olana	Jamal Abdi

AFRO-O also reported in October the detention of the following residents of Jimma Arjo, Wallega, at Arjo Police Station:

Mulugeta Barsisa	Kidane Chala
Abebe Wasene	Bekuma Ragasa
Ashebir Getacho	Mekonnen Ifa
Amsalu Getacho	Merga Ordofa
Fanta Tesema	Adunya Jalata
Bedasa Chowaka	Buli Tadesse
Luli Fekada	Galane Tadesse
Kasahun Bekele	Iticha Tadesse
Dereje Fufa	Tadesse Qadiru
Jirata Oljera	Addisu Dinkayo, teacher

In the same report, AFRO-O, listed the following residents being detained in Nekemte, in addition to five of those reported by Amnesty International, above:

Abarash Rafisa, businessman	Akasa Wakene
Gamachis Wadajo, teacher	Waqshum Namosa, student
Kebede Nanara	Tekalin Alemayo, teacher

The following residents of Shambu, E. Wallega, were also reported by AFRO-O to be held at Shambu police station:

Amsalu Tolesa, civil servant
Mosisa Jalata, pharmacist
Tesfaye Hordofa, civil servant
Haile Hambissa, civil servant

In a Press Release on 12 August 2007, the OLF reported hundreds of arrests in Shambu, with the town being ‘virtually under a Tigrean siege’ from 31 July to 3 August. Their report includes those detained in Shambu who were reported in October by AFRO-O to have been detained (above). The following were also detained:

Gadafa Tolera, project manager for the NGO, Education for Development
Marga Wirtu, teacher
Gudata Ayana, businessman
Dr Haile, veterinarian
Dhaba Kumsa, businessman
Itafa Jirata, civil servant, Shambu Agricultural Office

The army, guided by ‘a few renegades’ looted cash, radios and mobile phones from homes of those they detained. The OLF reported that arrests continued in other areas of Horro Guduru. About ten, including health officer Tadesse Dhinsa from Abe Dongoro, were reported detained in Tullu Wayu. Newly established camps of Tigrean soldiers were reported in E. Wallega and waves of arrests were said to be occurring in Abay Choman, Jimma Ganati, Amuru, Jarte and other areas.

Fexene Imana, farmer, and Raga Imana, teacher, were reported by AFRO-O to be held at Gaba Robi, Wallega

AFRO-O reported the following to be detained in its October report but the place of detention was not known:

Itageny Kebede, from Gachi
Tadele, student, Gore
Abiot Hailu, businessman, Mettu
Alemayo Tola, Urumu
Dereje Alemu, Dega
Elias Naro, Mettu (see HRLHA report, below))
Tewodros Mijena, Lalo Asabi

Press Release No. 8 of the HRLHA, published in January 2008, reported waves of arrests over several months throughout Oromia and the arrest of several dozen, including many students and teachers, in Mettu, Illbabor, including the following, most of whom had been detained on 12 and 13 January:

Namarra Adamu, High School teacher

Zelalem Emmmanuel, Elementary School teacher

Elias Nyaro, teacher (also detained in October 2007, see above)

Bula Kura, businessman

Kasahun Fida, student

Biruk Sewunet, student

Balaxee Wolde-Semayat, student

Another student, nicknamed ‘Girany’

Some of these, including Elias Nyaro, have been subject to repeated episodes of detention and harassment in recent years. None have been charged or appeared in court and all are accused of involvement with the OLF.

Tigray Region

Disappearance and detention

A 28 year-old Oromo government employee wrote on 2 February to OSG about the detention of his 25 year-old brother in Adigrat, Tigray. His family were unaware of his whereabouts for a whole year before being informed anonymously that he had been given an 11 year prison sentence for reasons which were unknown.

Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region

33 Demonstrators killed

Addis Admas (1 March) reported the deaths of 33 demonstrators and the wounding of 50 others in clashes with police after the Gewada (Ale) demands for special Woreda status were ignored and their members had been detained and dismissed from their jobs. Nine policeman were also reported killed. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council called for an independent investigation into the incident.

Anuak defects to USA; reports death threats by Gambella Governor Omot Olom

Obang Oman, an Anuak who was deputy Director for Agricultural Research in Gambella, defected on 7 June, on the eve of his delegation's departure back to Ethiopia from the USA. He had accompanied the Governor of Gambella, Omot Olom, on a tour designed to persuade Anuak that it was safe to return to Gambella. There were protests by Anuak refugees in Minneapolis when the delegation visited there on 31 May. Omot Olom is implicated in the mass rape and genocidal killing of more than 1,100 Anuak in late 2003 and early 2004, according to Genocide Watch and the World Organisation Against Torture (see OSG Press Release 40, July 2004, pp. 29-36.).

Oman explained to *Addis Voice* that he defected because he was tired of being expected to cover up the government's intention to 'eradicate the Anuak'. He had been threatened with being killed by Governor Omot Olom because he questioned the arbitrary killing of two young Anuak men by Ethiopian soldiers in March 2006. After that, he had been demoted several times. He had been ordered to come on the tour to give credibility to the message that it was safe for Anuak to return. Shortly after his defection, his wife was thrown out of their home and he is fearful for the safety of her and their children.

Mourners arrested in Awassa

In July 1998, Lencha Hirpo Muleta, an Oromo failed asylum seeker in the UK, committed suicide. His family, still in Awassa, Southern Peoples Region, where he used to work, were unable to arrange for his body to be sent back to Ethiopia but were forced to hold a mourning ceremony without him. His son wrote from exile in Nairobi on 15 February and reported how the funeral ceremony had been broken up by security forces and many had been arrested. He and his mother eventually made their way to Kenya, but she died in Moyale before crossing the border.

Amhara Region

Killings

In its 29th Regular Report, January 2008, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, reported the beating and shooting to death by prison guards of the following five prisoners in Mota prison, East Gojjam after a drunken brawl on 5 August 2007:

Bamlaku Azmeraw Worku, 29, businessman, Mota, beaten to death

Yeshiwas Mekonnen, 50, CUD member, Ense-Sar Midir, shot

Ambelu Gedefaw, 48, CUD member, Ense-Sar Midir, shot

Jemberu Yibeltal, 24, CUD member, Ense-Sar Midir, shot
Nigat Settie, Ense-Sar Midir, shot

The men were all buried in the same grave and their relatives were required to obtain letters from their Kebeles saying that the men had been responsible for their own deaths before the effects of the deceased were handed over.

Ogaden/Somali Region

Human Rights Watch Press Release, Nairobi, 12 June

***Ethiopia: Army commits executions, torture and rape in Ogaden.
Donors should act to stop crimes against humanity.***

In its battle against rebels in eastern Ethiopia's Somali Region, Ethiopia's army has subjected civilians to executions, torture, and rape, Human Rights Watch said in a new report released today. The widespread violence, part of a vicious counter-insurgency campaign that amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity, has contributed to a looming humanitarian crisis, threatening the survival of thousands of ethnic Somali nomads.

The 130-page report 'Collective Punishment: War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in the Ogaden Area of Ethiopia's Somali Regional State,' documents a dramatic rise in unchecked violence against civilians since June 2007, when the Ethiopian army launched a counterinsurgency campaign against rebels who attacked a Chinese-run oil installation. The Human Rights Watch report provides the first in-depth look at the patterns of abuse in a conflict that remains virtually unknown because of severe restrictions imposed by the Ethiopian government. 'The Ethiopian army's answer to the rebels has been to viciously attack civilians in the Ogaden,' said Georgette Gagnon, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. 'These widespread and systematic atrocities amount to crimes against humanity. Yet Ethiopia's major donors, Washington, London and Brussels, seem to be maintaining a conspiracy of silence around the crimes.'

Human Rights Watch researchers located and interviewed more than 100 victims and eyewitnesses to abuses, as well as traders, business leaders, and regional government officials located in neighboring Kenya, the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland in northern Somalia and in Ethiopia. The research, largely carried out between September and December 2007, was further supplemented with satellite imagery that confirmed the burning of some villages. In chilling accounts, witnesses and victims described to Human Rights Watch nightly beatings with the barrel of a gun, public executions, and the burning of entire villages.

The report describes the army's response to the April 2007 attack by the rebel Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) on a Chinese-run oil installation in Obole that killed more than 70 Chinese and Ethiopian civilians. During the peak of the army's counterinsurgency campaign from June to September 2007, witnesses

described how Ethiopian troops forcibly displaced entire rural communities and destroyed dozens of rural villages; executed at least 150 civilians, sometimes in demonstration killings to terrorize those communities suspected of supporting the ONLF; and arbitrarily detained hundreds of civilians in military barracks where they experienced beatings, torture, and widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence. Thousands of civilians fled the conflict-affected areas for neighboring countries. Some of the patterns of violence are ongoing, and Human Rights Watch believes its findings represent only a fraction of the actual abuses.

Ethiopian authorities also stepped up their forced recruitment of local militia forces, many of whom are sent to fight against the ONLF without military training, resulting in large casualty rates.

The rebel ONLF has also been responsible for serious violations of the laws of war, including the summary executions of Chinese and Ethiopian civilians during the April 2007 attack on the Obole oil installation and killing suspected government collaborators, which are considered war crimes.

Many civilians living in the conflict zone are nomads who must move to fresh grazing areas and regional markets to sell their livestock. Since mid-2007, Ethiopian forces have imposed a series of measures aimed at cutting off economic support to the ONLF, including a trade blockade on the war-affected region, restricted access to water, food and grazing areas, confiscation of livestock and trade goods, and obstruction of humanitarian assistance. In combination with the drought produced by successive poor rains, this 'economic war' is threatening the lives of thousands of civilians, yet many of them lack access to food aid due to government manipulation of food distribution.

'The government's attacks on civilians, its trade blockade, and restrictions on aid amount to the illegal collective punishment of tens of thousands of people,' said Gagnon. 'Unless humanitarian agencies get immediate access to independently assess the needs and monitor food distribution, more lives will be lost.'

The Ethiopian government did not respond to Human Rights Watch's requests for access to the conflict-affected area, and has tried to stem the flow of information from the region. Some foreign journalists who have attempted to conduct independent investigations have been arrested and residents and witnesses have been threatened and detained in order to prevent them from speaking out. In July 2007, the government expelled the International Committee of the Red Cross from Somali Region, although it has since permitted some UN and nongovernmental humanitarian organizations to operate, albeit under tight controls.

The report also analyzes the Ethiopian government and international community's responses to the continuing abuses. Ethiopia continues to deny the allegations but has yet to investigate them or hold anyone accountable. Human Rights Watch says that donor governments are failing to demand human rights accountability, despite the substantial economic aid to Ethiopia and its partnership in regional counterterrorism efforts.

Western governments and institutions alone, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, give at least US\$2 billion in aid to Ethiopia annually, but have remained silent on the widespread abuses being committed in the Ogaden area. The US government, which views Ethiopia as a key partner in regional counterterrorism efforts, has failed to use its significant leverage, including military aid, to press for an end to the crimes.

Human Rights Watch called on major donors to press Ethiopia to end the violence and recommended that:

- The US government should investigate reports of abuses by Ethiopian forces, identify the specific units involved, and ensure that they receive no assistance or training from the United States until the Ethiopian government takes effective measures to bring those responsible to justice, as required under the ‘Leahy law,’ which prohibits US military assistance to foreign military units that violate human rights with impunity.
- The UK government and the European Union should condemn the abuses, publicly call on the Ethiopian government to investigate the crimes in Somali Region, demand that civilian and military officials are held accountable, and monitor development funding to ensure it is not being used for security operations.

‘Influential states use many excuses – such as lack of information and strategic priorities – to downplay the grave human rights concerns in Somali Region,’ said Gagnon. ‘But crimes against humanity can’t be swept under the carpet. Donor governments should reconsider their policies on Ethiopia until these abuses end and those responsible are brought to justice.’

Witness accounts from the report:

‘The soldiers came to Aleen, after they burned down Lahelow. Then they burned Aleen. We were there at the time. The soldiers arrived and ordered the people out of their homes. They gathered all of the people together. Then the commander ordered the village burned. The commander told us, ‘I have told you already to leave these small villages,’ and then they forced us out. Then they burned down all the homes. The houses are just huts, so it is easy to burn them.’

– Villager, September 23, 2007

‘They started beating me with the backs of their AK-47 guns. They hit me once with the gun in my face, and then started beating me. They also hit me with the gun barrel in my teeth, and broke one of my teeth. Then they started beating me with a fan belt on my back and my feet. It lasted for more than one hour. Then they tied both my legs and lifted me upside down to the ceiling with a rope, and kept beating me more, saying I had to confess. For two months, we underwent this same ordeal, being taken from our rooms at night and being beaten and tortured.’

– Thirty-one-year-old shopkeeper, September 20, 2007

‘I was taken away with two men, Hassan Abdi Abdullahi and Ahmed Gani Guled. First, they pulled ropes around the necks of the two men and pulled in opposite directions, and both fell down. They put me in a ditch while they were strangling the other two. One soldier tried to strangle me with the metal stick used for cleaning the gun [by pushing it down on my throat], but I twisted his finger until he released me. Then two other soldiers came and they put a rope around my neck and started pulling. That is the last thing I remember, until I woke up, still in the ditch. A naked body was on top of me, it was Ahmed Gani Guled, who was dead. I couldn’t move out of the ditch until I was found by some women who came to the waterhole.’

– Ridwan Hassan-rage Sahid, October 30, 2007

‘They wanted to intimidate the rest of us, so they brought the two girls who they said were the strongest ONLF supporters. They made the rest of us watch while they killed the two girls. First they tried to get them to confess, saying they would kill them otherwise. Then they shot both of them with their guns. Their names were Faduma Hassan, 17, and Samsam Yusuf, 18. Both were students.’

– Student, September 23, 2007

‘We have a well in Qoriley which is surrounded by wire. The army has prohibited us from using it, so you have to sneak in at night. All these things have been imposed on us this year. At nighttime, we will try and get some water to store in our houses. But if the soldiers see you are fetching water, they can kill you.’

– Villager, September 22, 2007

‘If [the federal government] followed the law, it would be good, but even the law they’ve created is not being followed.’

– Former regional court judge, December 5, 2007

In the summary of the 130 page report Human Rights Watch state that they have documented 150 extrajudicial killings in the Ogaden during the last year, many of them demonstration killings. They state that the information which they have confirmed is ‘only a glimpse of what is taking place – real figures are likely to be much higher’. The full report is available on the Human Rights Watch website.

UN mission foiled in 2007

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee (OHRC) expressed pleasure when the UN planned to send a humanitarian assessment mission to Ogaden on 30 August 2007. However, in a Press Release on 19 September, not quite a fortnight after the UN team left on 6 September, the OHRC wrote that the Ethiopian government had rendered the mission ‘meaningless’.

The mission was accompanied and guided by government officials and did not visit Fiiq and Wardheer regions, where there were mass graves and burnt out villages and towns.

Security forces had rounded up critics prior to the mission's arrival (see below) and the crowded jails and prisons in Jigjiga, Dhagaxbuur, Qabridaharre and Godey were emptied into secret detention centres until the UN team had left.

Victims of abuses and their relatives were warned that they would be severely punished if they spoke of their experiences to the team and government officials, members of the security forces and collaborators were presented as civilians and elders for the benefit of the team and to keep a close eye on potential informants to the UN mission. Army units were dressed in civilian clothes.

Detentions

Amnesty International reported the detention of two clan elders on 28 August. Sultan Fowski Mohamed Ali and engineer Ahmed Mohamed Tarah were arrested in Jigjiga and held incommunicado in Jigjiga barracks according to Amnesty International's Urgent Action 245/07 (AFR 25/023/2007). Both were respected elders with long histories as independent mediators in conflict resolution and regarded as prisoners of conscience. Sultan is an esteemed title.

On 26 June 2008 the OHRC issued a report (OHRC/PCG1/0608) which stated that Sultan Fowski Mohamed Ali was sentenced in Jigjiga to 22 years imprisonment on 12 May and was to be transferred to Ziway prison in Showa, alongside businessman Haji Ibrahim Had, who was sentenced to 16 years. Both were accused of supporting the ONLF.

Sultan Fowski was mandated by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to negotiate with the ONLF in June 2005 and was the mediator who successfully negotiated the release of Chinese oil-field workers who were taken by the ONLF in April 2007. He was accused of organising the grenade attacks during government rallies at Dhagaxbuur and Jigjiga on 28 May 2007.

(He is cousin to Bashir Ahmed Makhtal – one of three Canadians, held without trial or consular access, with an American and an unknown number of European nationals as 'enemy combatants' in Jigjiga, according to *Reuters*, *Associated Press*, *VOA* and Somali Region President, Abdullahi Hassan, in January.)

Haji Ibrahim is the financier of a clan militia which opposes the ONLF. He has lost two brothers in fighting alongside Ethiopian forces against the ONLF and therefore could not seriously be regarded as a supporter of the group. He was detained in December 2007.

On 20 May, the Jigjiga court sentenced eight Ogadenis to death for the grenade attacks at government rallies last year. Their families reported that they were innocent civilians, detained for their beliefs and tribal backgrounds. They were not given particulars of the evidence against them and not properly represented in court. Opposition groups believe government forces threw the devices.

Mass killings, rape and other abuses

The June 2008 OHRC report included details of the killing of 4 year-old Hanad Moallin Abdullah by soldiers stamping on his abdomen, in front of his mother, Fadumo Abdi, on 26 July 2007.

Ethiopian soldiers arrived in Qorille on 22 July 2007 with a list of names of people whom they detained and tortured in Qorille barracks before killing them on 24 July in Babaase. Most were hanged from acacia trees and then shot to ensure they were dead. Victims included:

Hassan Abdi Abdullahi

Farah Hassan Halonfi

Imoge Badal Abdi Abdullahi

Mrs Ayan Aw Ali God

Hassan Burale Ilmi-Yare

Hussein Gahnug

Ali Burale Ilmi-Yare

Abdirashid Sheikh Mohamoud

Ahmed-Gani Guled Ali

Ridwan Hassan Rage survived in a critical condition; Qarjaf Haji Osman and Ina Arab Ismail were missing after the atrocity.

Security forces forbade removal of the remains for burial and the bodies ‘were displayed in public to spread terror among the population’.

A 17 year-old girl who survived told OHRC ‘Ethiopian government soldiers came with a list of names and then took a number of villagers. They beat us indiscriminately, torched our huts and then hanged some of us from acacia trees, while others were choked with metal rods and rope one by one. When it was my turn, two soldiers grabbed me and tied a rope around my neck. They pulled in different directions until I collapsed. They left me for dead but thanks to God I am still alive.’

Rape was particularly common against relatives of suspected ONLF members and against members of the Ogaden Women’s Democratic Association and has resulted in an increase in HIV/AIDS infections and pregnancies.

A 70 year-old nomad woman, Adar Mohamoud Adan, visiting relatives in Garigo’an, was taken to the military barracks there on 16 June 2006, tortured and gang-raped. Three days later, her body was thrown outside the barracks.

OHRC reported forced sexual slavery and forced marriages in military barracks throughout Ogaden.

OHRC also reported the rape of children by government soldiers.

Disappearance is commonplace and follows detention in military camps or transfer to unofficial detention centres in Harar, Addis Ababa, Ziway or Mekele, according to the report.

The *Mail and Guardian* in Nairobi reported on 10 July an interview with 30 year-old widow Suleikha Mohamed Adan. Her nomadic life as a mother of five was hard enough before soldiers arrested her on suspicion of supporting the ONLF, the same charge which resulted in the killing of her husband and father last year. She was kept in an underground prison in Godey for 15 months with hundreds of other prisoners. Speaking from her home in Eastleigh, Nairobi, she said ‘Soldiers would

take me out to beat me up and sometimes rape me. Younger women were the soldiers' favourites. While I was there, I saw two old men hanged from the roof with a wire and they both died.'

Shabelle Media Network on 6 July reported widespread rape by Ethiopian troops of women and girls in their homes and villages and the rape of detainees in military bases in Dhagaxbuur, Fiiq, Wardheer, Qabridaharre, Jigjiga, Shilabo, Duhun and many smaller camps. Their reporters were told by a farmer of his wife being strangled with rope by soldiers while she was nursing their one-year old child. A 25 year-old woman told of Ethiopian soldiers coming to her village each night to pick a different girl to be gang-raped. A staff member from Médecins sans Frontières told them she saw women and children being chased around water wells by soldiers intent on rape. They reported several interviews with women who had been raped repeatedly over several days by several soldiers when fetching water, sometimes several hours walk from their homes.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee, on 26 June, reported that they had recorded 2,725 extra-judicial killings by government forces in the Ogaden, 2,256 victims of rape, and 3,241 disappearances. They have also reported that escaping to Puntland, Somaliland, Djibouti or government-controlled areas of Somalia is met with detention, mistreatment and being handed over to Ethiopian forces 'in exchange for ammunition, materials or simply to prove loyalty, cooperation and friendship to Ethiopia'.

Manufactured humanitarian crisis

According to the June OHRC report, villages were razed and depopulated by economic blockade in the regions of Dhagaxbuur, Fiiq, Qabridaharre, Wardheer, Godey, Afdheer and some parts of Jigjiga.

Confiscation of water reservoirs and tankers has exacerbated the effects of sixteen years of poor rains on human and animal health. No food aid is reaching the worst hit areas of Dhagaxbuur, Fiiq, Wardheer, Godey and Qorraxay. Staple food prices have risen four-fold since the blockade began last year, according to OHRC.

In a statement on 6 February, HRW's Africa Director, Peter Takirambudde, said 'Ethiopian troops are destroying villages and property, confiscating livestock and forcing civilians to relocate . . . these abuses violate the laws of war'.

The HRW report in June 2008 included the burning of recent harvest and other food stocks.

The International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins sans Frontières were expelled from the region by the Ethiopian government in July 2007.

On 10 July this year, the Swiss branch of Médecins sans Frontières, less than a year since the organisation was allowed back into the Ogaden, announced it was withdrawing from the area, according to a *Reuters* report. In the six months since January the organisation had only been allowed to work on the outskirts of Fiiq for

a total of five weeks because of government delays in providing work permits. Intimidation and arrests of staff and administrative hurdles made work impossible.

Information blackout

According to the June OHRC report ‘The Ogaden region is off-limits to international humanitarian and human rights organisations as well as international press. The Ethiopian government has imposed on the region a complete media blackout to cover up the atrocities, which are being committed on daily basis by its military against defenceless civilians.’

New York Times reporter Jeffrey Gettleman, was imprisoned with two colleagues for five days when their article on the Ogaden was published in January. Their equipment was confiscated.

On 5 March, *Reuters* wrote about anonymous reports to the *Christian Science Monitor* from aid workers in the Ogaden concerning public executions, rape, torture, arbitrary detention and beatings and how their presence in the region was conditional on their maintenance of silence about such abuses. Silence was even more important for local staff. They might be imprisoned or killed if they spoke to media.

The Ethiopian government has repeatedly said that claims by aid workers were baseless and accused MSF-Switzerland, on their withdrawal in July, of ‘disseminating hearsay which stands in sharp contrast to the realities on the ground’. Similar criticisms were levelled at reports by Human Rights Watch when the government challenged HRW to produce evidence of ‘just one burnt hut’ following their earlier report. In their latest report on 12 June, HRW include evidence from satellite images of the razing to the ground of whole villages and towns in eight separate locations.

Sudan

Detentions and refoulement

Amnesty International reported on 31 October (AFR 25/024/2007) the refoulement of 15 mandated Ethiopian refugees from Sudan, which had occurred on 27 September. UNHCR, unaware of the deportation until one week after the event, announced on 11 October that it was a breach of Sudan’s obligations to the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention. Amnesty International reported that the 15 deportees were among hundreds of Ethiopians and Eritreans arrested shortly after Ethiopia’s foreign minister visited Sudan in late June 2007. Some were detained in Omdurman prison in Khartoum but the whereabouts of most were not known. Some were charged with illegal entry and summarily detained or deported. Many had been in Sudan since the

1970s. A large proportion of these and the later arrivals had been given refugee status by UNHCR. UNHCR noted the arrest of 30 Ethiopian refugees by the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Service on 2 and 3 July in Khartoum and Damazine and the failure of the Sudanese government to respond to repeated appeals by UNHCR for their release. It was feared that 20 more detained refugees might also be deported to Ethiopia. In the press release, UNHCR stated ‘After a separate and unrelated instance of refoulement to Ethiopia on August 7, the Sudanese government had assured UNHCR that it would not repeat such violations of international and national law. UNHCR was alarmed to discover that this commitment was not respected.’

The September deportees included 74 year-old Atanaw Wasie, former leader of the Ethiopian Democratic Union which had opposed the Derg, and 14 Oromo who were suspected of supporting the OLF. The Hannover-based group, OMRHO, reported that the border at Metema, about 500 km south-east of Khartoum, was closed for a day before the deportees were handed over to Ethiopian security forces who took them away in a sealed vehicle under heavy guard to unknown places of detention.

Toronto-based HRLHA also reported in their 6th Press Release, January 2008, the handing over of three Oromo in the border town of Gedaref at the end of September – Wendimu (Adem Bisil), Milkessa Lama and Teshome (father’s name unknown). However, it is probable that these three were among detainees (see below) reported by both OMRHO and HRLHA to have been held and mistreated in Dabki (or Dabaq) detention centre, about 150 km north of Khartoum at the end of September before transfer to Kober prison in Khartoum at the end of December 2007. Large bribes of 100,000 Sudanese pounds were extracted from visiting relatives, according to HRLHA. Among the detainees, both groups named:

Adunya Shiferaw

Harun Idris

Mohammed (or Gamachis) Nado

Abdalla Suleman

Shantam Atalay (or Amsalu)

Ibrahim Yousouf (or Itana), alias Marqos Gobana

OMRHO named others who were probably those named by HRLHA as being handed over at Gedaref:

Abamalka (or Adam) Bisil

Milkessa Hailu, and

Teshome.

HRHLA also named Kamal Kalbeessa among the detainees in Dabki.

The Berlin-based Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners accused UNHCR on 15 March of handing over four members of the Amhara refugee community in Khartoum to Sudanese authorities.

An OSG contact in Khartoum reported the detention of two Oromo UNHCR-mandated refugees on 10 May, Abdulmajid Junedi and Darara Hassan. They were

held and tortured overnight and returned to their homes by taxi the following day because of injuries received. A short while afterwards they were again removed that day by Sudanese security men. Concerned friends were told by police on 15 May that they had been released the day before, but no trace of them could be found. They were eventually released after three weeks detention, ‘severely wounded and fearful’.

VOA reported on 14 May that 28 Ethiopian farmers had been taken by Sudanese soldiers from Quara camp in Gonder, and sentenced with two years detention at a place about 90 minutes drive from Khartoum, because they were farming on the wrong side of the border.

The London-based Sudan Organisation Against Torture announced on 9 January that in addition to some of the detainees named above, the following had been handed over to Ethiopia for being in Sudan illegally – Adam Pasilio, Minika Hailo and Faisal Mohamed Osman. Argana Sifim, who was said by the group to have been detained with the others is not known to have been handed over. The Khartoum court which ordered the deportation of the others had no record of him.

Kenya

Death squads

The OLF reported the murder of Garomsa Abdisa, a Kenyan Oromo, in the border town of Moyale on 4 September 2007. He and an Oromo woman were shot dead out in the open, in front of the Kenyan government office by Ethiopian government soldiers, who then returned to the Ethiopian side of the border.

An Oromo student living in exile in Nairobi wrote to OSG with information about the killing of three men, including two former students of Addis Ababa university at their flat in the Eastleigh area of Nairobi on Friday 2 November 2007. Gunmen, wearing dark sweaters, masks and goggles, shot dead the two students, 23 year-old Indalkachew Teshome Asefa, his Nairobi neighbour, Hadiya student Mallas Habib and a Kenyan security guard, Geoffrey. Two of Indalkachew’s brothers, 22 year-old Indeshaw and 17 year-old Girma, both also students, were injured. In addition, a neighbour, 60 year-old Dadi Areda, was shot in the face for raising the alarm and lost one eye as a result. The police, who arrived shortly after the incident, discounted robbery as a motive for the attack, as nothing was missing. HRLHA also reported this and the following attack on journalists. OSG’s informant escaped unscathed from a similar attack on 10 November.

HRLHA, in their annual report, published June 2008, stated that two alleged OLF members had been arrested by Kenyan police and deported to Ethiopia and that 19 other Oromo were in detention and in danger of being deported.

Ethiopian Review, 4 November 2007, also reported the murders on 2 November. The next day, the journal reported that gunmen went to the temporary residence of four exiled Ethiopian journalists at 5.00 a.m., tied their hands behind their backs and dragged them from their rooms but neighbours raised the alarm and the gunmen were beaten off. The six gunmen, three TPLF and three wearing Kenyan military uniforms, left the journalists lying injured on the floor. One of the journalists is a member of the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association. A recent edition of the TPLF journal, *Abiyotawi Democracy*, called for measures to be taken against journalists who were harming the image of the TPLF. The *Ethiopian Review* reported receiving an increase in the number of death threats from TPLF agents in the USA following the publication.

Djibouti

Abduction and deportation

The HRLHA's reporter in Djibouti informed the group of the exodus from a refugee camp of many Oromo refugees on hearing that Djibouti security forces were again planning to return them to Ethiopia. HRLHA name 12 who managed to escape and two, Tamam Ahmed Bashir, from Illubabor, and Tesfaye Eshetu, from Jimma, who were arrested on 16 October and detained at Gabot prison. Virtually the whole of the Oromo refugee population in Djibouti were coerced or physically forced back to Ethiopia in 2003 and on the closure of Aour Aousa camp in mid 2004. Having made their way to Kenya via Somalia in 2004, eleven wrote to OSG from Nairobi, where they still live in fear of Ethiopian security agents and spies among the refugee community.

The abduction and forced labour of two young Oromo refugees in November 2007 and their deportation back to Ethiopia was reported in the HRLHA's 4th Press Release. 16 year-old Umar Aliyi, from Boke Xiqo, Hararge, and 21 year-old Abdulfatah Abdulatif, from Harar city, were picked from the street by Djibouti police on their way home from the Catholic Church School. They were held at Lagad prison/deportation centre before being taken to a construction site where they were forced to perform hard labour for three weeks before being taken over the border into Ethiopia.

In 2008, the HRLHA reported the arrest of four young male Oromo refugees on 1 February. The four youngsters were again taken from the street after leaving classes at the Catholic Church School. They were held at Lagad, physically mistreated and forced to perform 12hrs/day hard labour on a construction site while awaiting deportation to Ethiopia. Their names are:

Kadir Hassan Ahmed, 17

Abdulaziz Ahmed Haji Muhamed, 17

Fatih Mohamed Ali, 16

Muhamed Abdo Ahmed, 17

Somaliland

Torture and forced repatriation

In its first Press Release, October 2007, the HRLA reported the murder by two gunmen of Yadata, an Oromo living in Hargeissa, on 6 October, while he was walking to a friend's house.

In the same report is the abduction by Somaliland government forces of Abbas Abdala Sa'id, an Oromo employee in Hargeissa, from his workplace on 7 October. He was handed over to Ethiopian security forces along with more than ten men and women who were allegedly involved with the ONLF. Also handed over to Ethiopian forces were three soldiers who had defected from the Ethiopian army, including two who were named as Ilala Mohamed and Geremu Tesfaye. They were arrested by Somaliland forces and handed over at the end of September at the border town of Wachale. The location of all of these deportees is unknown.

Amnesty International (AFR 25/026/2007) reported on 5 November 2007 that five Ethiopian Somalis from the Ogaden were arrested in Hargeissa by Somaliland authorities at the request of Ethiopia and handed over to them on 13 October. The five were:

Mohamed Sheikh Abdi Sheikh Mahamud, businessman and long term resident in Hargeissa

Mohamed Adan Omar, businessman

Jowhar Sheikh Bashir, teacher

Khadar Abdi Tarsan, businessman

Mohamed Abdi Aar, businessman

They were believed to have been transferred to military barracks in Jigjiga but their exact location was not known.

Others who were arrested with them several days earlier, also on suspicion of having links with the ONLF, were later released.

Press Release 7 of the HRLHA, January 2008, included the capture and handing over to Ethiopian forces of four Oromo who were living in Hargeissa, three of whom are named:

Abba Cali Abba Biya, 45, from Hararge

Riyad Haji Kamal, 31, father of two, from Gasera, Bale

Jamal Wallaga.

The four were handed over at Wachale and their subsequent location is not known. TPLF security agents, who are investigating and identifying individuals within the Oromo community in Hargeissa, were reported to be carrying a list of 40 names of those most wanted by the regime. Many Oromo are changing their location frequently to avoid detection.

The annual report of HRLHA also includes the abduction and torture of two Oromo refugees by Ethiopian soldiers in Somaliland.

Bayan Muktar Mohammed was taken from Wachale on 2 February. Originally from W. Hararge, the father of five has UNHCR refugee status. He fled to Somaliland to escape harassment and intimidation. He arrived back in Wachale 'in a critical condition' with one hand paralysed.

Abdulmalik Adam Abdullahi, 32, from Deder, Hararge, was taken at gunpoint from his workplace as a security guard in Hargeissa on 15 February and handed over to Ethiopian forces. He was taken to Jigjiga barracks and subjected to solitary confinement and torture for one month. He was then released in 'critical condition' because his arrest had been due to mistaken identity.

A press release from the OHRC on 21 May reported the abduction and transfer to Ethiopian custody of two long term Hargeissa residents and non-political businessmen from their family homes one week previously. Harir Mohamoud Dool and Andinassir Aw Muhumed were handed over after being held briefly in Hargeissa and were transferred to incommunicado detention in Jigjiga.

Puntland

Explosions and deportations

During the evening of 5 February, Oromo refugees gathered in two hotels or tea-houses, owned and run by Melaku and Jamal Arsii, themselves refugees, and were watching Oromo language videos. Both places were habitual haunts for Oromo refugees in Bosasso. At 8.00 p.m., two grenades were thrown into the tea-houses. More than 100 were badly wounded and 65 were killed in the explosions. The 9th Press Release from HRLHA reported that the attack was coordinated by the joint security forces of Ethiopia and Puntland because:

One day prior to the attack, houses of refugees in Buro and Borama towns were searched by both Ethiopian and Puntland security forces working together;

Thirty seconds before the explosions, the electricity supply to the whole town was turned off and telephone lines were disconnected;

Bosasso was surrounded by heavily armed security forces and all roads in and out were blocked;

Immediately after the attacks, bodies were loaded onto two trucks and taken to secret locations;

A vehicle belonging to the Ministry of the Interior of Puntland was identified at the place of the attack.

The Hannover-based OMRHO reported that armed soldiers fired on the victims of the explosions and that the homes of 250 Oromo refugees were set on fire.

Although *Reuters* reported on 7 February that Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the massacre, this has not been confirmed and fits neither the group's ideology nor its habits.

In April, Puntland security agents arrested two ONLF politicians in Garowe and handed them over to Ethiopian forces, followed by eight civilians a few days later, according to *Garowe Online*.

A press release from the OHRC confirmed this report. On 22 April, ONLF Executive Committee member, Abdinur Mohamed Soyán, and Central Committee member, Dire Afi Elmi, were handed over to Ethiopian security forces in Garowe.

OHRC reported that on 11 April, Abdullahi Ali Mohamed, businessman and cousin of Abdinur Mohamed Soyán, was tortured to death by Ethiopian and Puntland security forces. Abdinur was asked to come to Puntland to collect his deceased cousin's wife and children from Bosasso. Dire Afi and his family lived in Puntland as his wife originated from there.

The two politicians were taken to Wardheer barracks, Jigjiga barracks and thence to Harar, where they have disappeared in custody.

A Somali elder from Galkacyo, Abdalla Jamal Jibril, confirmed the repatriations to the BBC and was himself detained by Puntland authorities on 4 May for doing so.

Ogaden Somalis who were handed over more than a week after the politicians were not politically inclined, however. A large number were rounded up and detained without charge on 1 May. Some were handed over on 2 May, including Abdinur Siyad Ismail, Abdiyare Haybe Omar, Omar Sheikh Mohamoud and Farah Good. They are being held incommunicado in Tankgne barracks, Wardheer. According to OHRC, they were construction workers with no political background.

A 21 May OHRC press release reported the burning of homes and frequent assault of Ethiopian Somalis/Ogadenis in Puntland and the arrest of five at Bosasso airport on 13 May. *Garowe Online* (14 May) and the OHRC reported the five were being taken to Garowe, Puntland's capital, when they were recalled to Bosasso, the commercial centre of Puntland. According to *Garowe Online*, the men had arrived by air from Djibouti and were suspected by the Puntland Intelligence Service of belonging to the ONLF and of having come from training in Eritrea. The Minister of Security apparently ordered the return of the five to Bosasso. Answering pleas by human rights activists to retract from handing the men over to Ethiopia, Vice-President Hassan Dahir Afqura said he was powerless in the matter as a 'third hand' was directly involved with the arrests. The present whereabouts of the detainees is unknown.

Yemen

Dangerous passage

In June, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) issued a report titled 'No Choice' on the dangerous migration by sea from Puntland and Djibouti to Yemen. Desperately seeking refuge from the violence and food shortage in Somalia or from persecution and food shortage in Ethiopia, thousands take the 5-10% risk of dying on the journey to again risk trying to move on from Yemen to gain employment in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere.

MSF report UN figures showing that in 2007, 30,000 embarked on the journey and more than 1,400 were drowned or disappeared. In the first five months of 2008, 20,000 have arrived and at least 400 have died in the attempt.

Over 100 are forced onto boats designed for 30-40 people and refugees arrive after the 2-3 day journey exhausted and sick. From the 250 testimonies given to MSF, deaths occurred in one third of the boats, from overcrowding, beating, food and water deprivation or drowning when fear of discovery by Yemeni coastguards forces the traffickers to jettison their cargo offshore.

Yemen has limited resources and assistance is scarce for the arrivals. At a two day conference in Sanaa in May, Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi said that there were 500,000 immigrants in Yemen. Only a fraction register with UNHCR. A paper presented at the conference reported that most migrants came from Oromo, Tigray and Somali regions of Ethiopia and from Somalia and that they travel from the shores around Bosasso in Puntland and Obock in Djibouti.

There are probably about 26 boats making two trips per month from around Bosasso, charging \$50-80 per person, \$150 for faster boats.

IRIN was told in December 2007 by the acting mayor of Bosasso, Yusuf Nur Bide, that 10,000 migrants live in Bosasso and, on average, five trucks arrive daily, each carrying 200 more. One boat owner told IRIN that the Puntland authorities were reluctant to address the problem because they had connections to the trade and 'it would be politically difficult for the government to shut them down'.

Egypt

Forced repatriations

The son of an assassinated OPDO politician narrowly escaped deportation back to Ethiopia from Egypt recently. He was held by Egyptian authorities when visiting other Ethiopian asylum seekers in detention, to give them food and clothing. He was detained himself at Giza deportation prison and was scheduled for deportation on 4 June. Fortunately, UNHCR were persuaded to reopen his case after refusing his application in 2005 and his appeal in 2007.

IRIN reported on 26 June that Egypt has been cracking down on immigrants from elsewhere in the Horn of Africa. One thousand immigrants from Eritrea were repatriated in the two weeks before the report, despite UN objections.

Hundreds of immigrants are in detention in Egypt, having failed to cross the border to Israel and 14 were shot dead along the border so far this year, according to the report.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are critical of Egypt's response and the head of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Hossam Bahgat, said 'This is a government that is effectively saying the only choice is to either murder African migrants on the borders of Israel or send them back to torture and murder in their countries'.

Correction

It was mistakenly stated in OSG Report 43 (p. 12) that the President of Oromia Supreme Court, Teshale Abera, was previously President of Assela High Court, Arsi. He was previously a Judge at that court. It was also erroneously reported that he was ordered to consider 80,000 cases of 2005 post-election protestors in Oromia courts. The figure was 18,000, not 80,000. This mistake appeared on pages 3 and 12 of the report. OSG apologises to Judge Teshale for these errors.

Abbreviations

AFRO-O	Advocacy for Fundamental Rights of Oromo and Others
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy, opposition party
EHRCO	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front, governing coalition
HRLHA	Human Rights League for the Horn of Africa
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network (UN news agency)
Maikelawi CID	Central Investigation Department in Addis Ababa
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
NEB	National Election Board
OFDM	Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement, opposition party
OHRC	Ogaden Human Rights Committee
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OMRHO	Oromo Menschenrechts und Hilfsorganisation (Oromo Human Rights and Relief Organisation)
ONC	Oromo National Congress, opposition party (now replaced with OPC)
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPC	Oromo Peoples Congress, evolved from ONC
OPDO	Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation (government Oromo Party)
OSG	Oromia Support Group
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region
TPLF	Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front, dominant party in EPRDF
UEDF	United Ethiopian Democratic Forces, coalition opposition party, including ONC and OPC
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VOA	Voice of America radio station

The Oromia Support Group is a non-political organisation which attempts to raise awareness of human rights abuses in Ethiopia. OSG has now reported 4,160 extra-judicial killings and 944 disappearances of civilians suspected of supporting groups opposing the government. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been placed in illegal detention, where torture and rape are commonplace. Most of these detainees are Oromo.